UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DAYTON, OHIO

A FINAL DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROGRAM COMMISSION
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ADULT MEMBERSHIP CLASSES IN TOWN AND RURAL CONGREGATIONS

By

Roger Franklin Gedcke

North Branch, Michigan

June 1990

©

Copyright by
Roger Franklin Gedcke

1990

All Rights Reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

DEDICATION iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

LIST OF TABLES viii

LIST OF FIGURES ix

CHAPTER PAGE

I. THE ESSENCE OF THE PROJECT 1

The Intent Leading to the Project
The Program Goal

II. MY READINESS FOR ACTION 10

Biographical Outline
The Importance of My Rural Background
Values of My Urban Experiences
Ripe For New Opportunities

III. THE SPECIAL NATURE OF NORTH BRANCH 16

A Brief History
A Rural Community Engulfed in Change
The North Branch Area
School Enrollment Sharpens the Focus

IV. THE NORTH BRANCH CONGREGATION 22

Trends From History
Analyzing Membership Patterns
Membership Profile and Distribution
Leadership Profiles

V. BASING THE PROJECT ON SOUND THEOLOGY 31

The Seeking Nature of God
God's Searching Continues Through People
Gods Self-giving Nature Resulted in Jesus Christ
The Identity of Jesus Christ
The Incarnation of God

CHAPTER PAGE

Jesus, More Than Human
Jesus, In Touch With Human Kind
The Resurrection: Something More
Promises of the Divine Son of God
The Church, a Collective Fellowship, the Body of Christ
The Body of Christ
Agents on God's Behalf
Christian Caregiving
Indicators in the People Market
A Changing World
The Catalus of the Holy Spirit
Everyone is a Theologian
Behold, An Open Door

VI. INSIGHTS FROM SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES 64

Rural and Urban Differences
The Rural-Urban Synthesis
Observations of Rural and Urban Differences
Conclusions

VII. A PROJECT IS FORMED 75

The Early Stages
The Project in Outline
Project Associates Make Their Contribution
Inlisting Administrative Board and Council on Ministries Members
Interludes and Final Details
The Project in Action
Spinoffs and Ownership Development

VIII. RESULTS AND EVALUATIONS 92

Steps in a Positive Direction
Observations of the Project
#1: Classes Are a Place to Begin
#2: Classes Are a Tip of the Iceberg
#3: The Importance of Sunday Morning Involvement
#4: Where Are the Urban Refugees?
#5: New Members Need Introductions
Learnings From Class Evaluations
Class Evaluation of Pastor's Leadership
Evaluations From a Classroom Observer
A Pastor Learns and Grows

CHAAPTER PAGE

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE 114

Old Ways and a New Generation
Improving New Member Orientation
Continuing Education

APPENDIX

A Council on Ministries, North Branch United Methodist Church, Goals and Concerns 118

B North Branch Congregation Questionnaire 119

C Caring Members 121

D Adult Membership & Reaffirmation Class Sessions, One through Seven 123

E Class Evaluation of Pastor's Leadership Second Session 127

F Class Evaluation of Pastor's leadership Fifth Session 128

G Pastor's Leadership Evaluation 129

H Pastor's Evaluation by Susan K. Shoemaker 130

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY 132

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
1.	North Branch Leadership Pol, 1987	7
2.	The North Branch Area	18
3.	School Enrollment Sharpens the Focus	20
4.	Statistics for North Branch United Methodist Church . .	24
5.	Membership Age-Sex Pyramid	27
6.	Residence/Distance from Church	28
7.	Leadership/Membership/Age-Sex Pyramid	29

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE		PAGE
1.	Lapeer County & Townships	17
2.	North Branch School District	19

CHAPTER I

THE ESSENCE OF THE PROJECT

The Intent Leading to the Project

People in America have consistantly expressed differences between country and city dwellers. Jokes abound describing the two cultural groups. We laugh at the ignorant "country hayseed" or the arrogant "city slicker." The scientific discipline of sociology has further described rural and urban differences in philosophic and cultural perspectives.

Population migration has further sharpened rural and urban awareness. For numerous reasons, rural people have rather consistantly moved into urban commuities. Rural customs accompany the imigrants, but within a generation are overshadowed and almost extinguished by the dominate urban customs. The industrial revolution and the more recent automotive era encouraged rural people to move to the cities for employment. The once-rural person became urban under the attractions of city life and pressures to conform to city customs.

The migration pattern has reversed within the past twenty years. Urban people, in significant numbers, are choosing to live in rural areas, commuting fifty to seventy miles to their employment. These urban migrants want to live "out in the country", but often have not

significantly accepted rural cultural patterns. They choose to maintain some urban ways; for instance, they keep their cultural ties and fulfill service needs in the urban areas with which they are familiar. The distinctive urban habits and expectations are not swallowed up by their new rural environment. Adding to this migration phenomenon has been the gradual urbanization of rural America. Television, increasing affluence, and additional opportunities for travel and employment have influenced rural people. On their own, they are replacing numerous rural traditions. Urban migrants, therefore, do not experience the pressure to conform to the surrounding culture with the same strength as rural people feel in moving to the cities. Urban ways, including mall shopping and attendance at distant cultural events, are being embraced by rural people. As a result, a new social entity is emerging, identified by some with the term "rurbia" or "rurban" (Berkley 1982, 72-77).

Not everything works so smoothly, however, in this blending of urban and rural cultures. Rural people are not willing to step aside and allow new neighbors to assume significant leadership positions. Family names are treated with high regard. Rural people are familiar with "earning" community respect and position--they are not willing to change this principle. Today's rurban people are heard to remark, "I came to this community thirty years ago and I still feel like an outsider."

New, urban residents are frequently kept on the circumference of community leadership by their rural neighbors. A few residents overcome this leadership principle (if they are aggressive by nature) and

enter leadership positions by winning power struggles. Marrying into a respected community family is another means to get around the long-term leadership requirement. Cultural patterns in rural America may be changing, but decision-making rules tend to be tightly controlled by the long-time residents of modern rurbia.

This pattern of rural control is strongly felt in the rural community church. There is little resistance to welcoming new residents to the Sunday worship service and encouraging them to get involved in appropriate church activities. However, members of long-established families tend to hold on to dominant church leadership positions. New people, especially those with urban ideas, often are given nondecision positions, or are allowed to handle the "busy work" tasks. They seldom hold positions where final decisions are reached. In addition, few groups are started just for new people. While new and urban neighbors may feel welcomed, they may also wonder how long they must wait to really belong. Progress toward a harmonious, integrated congregation in rurbia is slowed to a crawl and sometimes reaches a standstill!

Some years ago, a pastor and seminar speaker expounded on his experience in ending rural leadership control. His first step in the rural church was enforcing a leadership term of three years, as once suggested in the United Methodist Book of Discipline. Within three years, one-half of the church's leadership were recent church members. A few long-time leaders felt relieved to no longer hold their position(s), but others were admittedly hurt and angry with this forced leadership change. The speaker also reported increasing inactivity by the replaced leaders. Former leaders began power struggles with the

new leaders. Forcing a leadership change alienated many people. Disunity among the members resulted, modeling an un-Christian-like conduct. I would agree that the controlled leadership base seen in numerous rural congregations should be ended, but the above method of forcing leadership change demands a very high price. Is there not a better way? New residents need to feel they belong, but can this not be accomplished with less pain? The Christian faith has responsibility to inspire other models for creative congregational change and development.

The intent of this project is to design another process and model to achieve integration of urban and rural background people into one congregation. First, respect for the significance and contributions of each culture must form the base of this method, and every attempt must be made to avoid a win-lose syndrom. Church leadership must be shared and balanced to represent all the people in the church membership. Alienation of one group by benefiting another must be seen as contrary to Christian faith and teachings. Second, the power struggle must be redirected. Instead, strategies are to be employed that will encourage members to pull together around shared commitments, in service to God and humanity. While change always causes some pain, the method used to bring it about, on the one hand, can damage and divide a congregation or, on the other hand, can build and unify their community life.

The writer of this document pondered for several years the issues surrounding United Methodist Churches in changing rural communities. Since 1972, my pastoral appointments have been to Town and Country

Parish settings. I have sought assistance through leadership training events and consultations with experts in parish ministry, in order to minister more effectively in rural congregations. Yet, most workshops and United Methodist training seminars seemed to focus on urban congregations. While American culture continues to move toward urbanization, rural congregations and their communities still dot the horizon. The rural church is a meeting place for both urban and rural cultures--together they must develop a future. At this point in time, however, United Methodist publications give little attention to the needs of rural congregations faced with an influx of urban people. There are few strategic plans available to assist with the integration of urban and rural congregations. It appears that such churches and people have been left on their own by the denomination's planning and leadership structure.

Attending seminars since being appointed to town and rural congregations has increased my awareness of the unique issues present in rural parishes. Selective reading has further clarified the changes that are influencing traditional rural churches when urban people move into rural communities. First-hand experience of these conditions came with my appointment in 1979 to the North Branch/Clifford Circuit. A visual look at the surrounding community identified North Branch as a farming community, with some small industry and recreational business clearly visible. Other factors indicated that these communities are locations where rural and urban patterns meet each other. The travel distance to major auto industrial plants and other urban employment measured less than fifty miles. New homes have been built

each year since 1970 on two-to-ten-acre sites. United States census figures indicate an increasing population for Lapeer County since 1960 and student enrollment has climbed each year in the North Branch Consolidated School System. The entire larger community of North Branch and Cliffored has developed into a prime area for urbanization. The changes brought about by a gradual influx of new and urban people into a once-rural community, now, are well established in North Branch. A study of rurbia in action has unfolded in this parish.

The Doctor of Ministry Program provides a long-term learning opportunity with the goal of developing methods to guide two Michigan congregations, North Branch and Clifford, into Christian Ministries and into this new American entity of rurbia.

The Program Goal

As described in the earlier paragraphs, all statistical information indicates that North Branch, once a rural community, is now a modern rurban community. The North Branch United Methodist Church obviously is part of this developing pattern. Established since 1856, the church numbers 325 people. A wide range of yearly programs meets the needs of all age categories. The congregation is financially stable. Is North Branch following the patterns of including new and urban people, or is it keeping them at a distance? Are key leadership positions shared with new people, or are decisions controlled by long-established families? Although new members are joining the church, are they meaningfully integrated into the total life of the congregation?

In 1987, an analysis of North Branch United Methodist Church's leadership pool was completed. Fifty-five members held leadership

positions. Forty-one (73%) of the leaders were long-time church members; fourteen (27%) were new, less than ten years residence in the community. The ages of the leaders were: age thirty-five or under, fifteen leaders (27%); thirty-six to sixty years of age, thirty-three leaders (60%); sixty-one years of age and older, seven leaders (13%) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. North Branch Leadership Pool, 1987

	Number	Percent
Long-time residence leaders	41	73
New leaders (less than ten years residence)	14	27
Totals	55	100
Age 35 or under	15	27
Age 36 to 60	33	60
Age 61 or over	7	13
Totals	55	100

In checking the leaders under thirty-five years of age, eleven of the fifteen come from long-time rural families. Of the 325 church members, 116 became members from 1977 to 1987, and 209 have been members longer than ten years. A limited number of young new members (predictably urban people), are now finding their way into the leadership pool of the North Branch United Methodist Church.

The North Branch Congregation is strong and consistent with 325 members. Sunday School and Summer Bible School activities are prevalant. Youth programs are supported. All bills are paid yearly. The

congregation is not struggling with survival problems. Yet, if only a few new persons enter the membership and church's leadership pool, a slight decline today will become a major problem in a few short years. Intentional plans are needed to assist this long-time rural congregation to deal creatively with this situation. Solutions to ways of including new and urban people in the life of the congregation in meaningful and effective ways had to be developed.

The program goal motivating this Doctor of Ministry project is to secure information and knowledge on the issues which are present as urban and rural persons live in the same community, and to develop a model that will enrich the ministry of their local church. The information gained will be shared with the congregations and, at the same time, a process will be developed to help the congregation take action to stimulate the integration of urban and rural background persons. It is expected that all levels and activities of the congregation will be addressed: one-to-one contacts, worship settings, youth groups, other small groups, committees, the Council on Ministries, and the Administrative Board. As many people as possible will be involved and their suggestions will be heard and used.

Synonyomous with the development and implementation of this program goal, the North Branch people began to generate a variety of new programs which were designed to assist in the integration of older and newer members. These programs will be described in a later chapter. Work with the Faculty Advisor and regional participants resulted in the development of a focus for the program goal. A series of six adult membership classes was pre-tested for feasibility as the project

for this Doctor of Ministry Program. Each class session centered on United Methodist issues, with urban and rural concerns and issues woven into the class content. A series of adult membership classes was started as an effort to stimulate integration. While both North Branch and Clifford churches were encouraged to participate in the project, the North Branch congregation quickly demonstrated interest and became the church where the membership classes were carried out. From this point on, this final document will reflect activities carried out with the North Branch church. It should be noted, however, that the studies involved in this project brought to light issues surrounding the integration of urban with rural people in general and informed the pastor and both congregations.

CHAPTER II

MY READINESS FOR ACTION

Biographical Outline

Life began for me in 1940 in south-central Ontario, Canada, on a medium sized, family farm. I learned my A B C's in a one-room country school, followed by five years of bus rides to the consolidated high school. Farming was our total life. We grew feed crops for our cattle, pigs, and poultry. Most social events were centered around local church activities. Our family attended a German Evangelical Association church, which became a part of the Evangelical United Brethren denomination and is now a congregation in the United Church of Canada. I know well the unique needs and philosophies of rural living. This background helps me to understand the struggles of rural congregations and to assist in working with the dynamics of integrating urban people into a long-time rural church.

In 1960, I enrolled in the College of Waterloo, Ontario, and began my introduction to larger cities. Seminary followed in Naperville, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. Attaining my Master of Divinity Degree in 1968, I pastored a small inner-city church in Detroit, Michigan. One year later I began a three-year assignment at a Ferndale church, located outside the Detroit city limits. My next pastoral appointment

brought a complete environmental change--seven years with seven churches in a Cooperative Parish in the north-western region of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I had come full-circle: growing up on a farm, then experiencing city life, and finally returning to the country! Rural issues, once again, became foremost in my experience, centered this time on copper mining, lumbering, hunting, and fishing. During this assignment, I chose to set my pastoral career toward churches in Town and Rural settings. My next and current appointment, North Branch and Clifford, Michigan, is most similar to my rural background. Farming is very much an economic center for people in these communities. Adding to this base, people are employed in nearby industrial and auto shops, the public education system, recreational centers, and community service vocations. These additional sources of employment reflect the direction of changes influencing the rural sector since my childhood. My rural background, however, provides an adequate foundation for being sensitive to rural America today. My urban experiences help me identify the forces of urbanization influencing rural communities. I can provide positive leadership to these rurbia congregations as I develop my pastoral skills.

The Importance of My Rural Background

My rural background allows my leadership to be effective in rural congregations. First-hand experience teaches that rural life creates a philosophy, a methodology, and a value system often different from urban living. From my background, I readily sense the feelings and views of persons in rural congregations. Rural people tend to react against the planning structures of big business. They wish to remain

independent and self-directing. Rural people are often suspicious of "city life and city ways"--they want to keep a slower lifestyle, relaxed from deadlines and five-year goals. Long-term planning is often seen as a waste of time. Tensions may arise as urban and rural background persons live in the rural community; the strengths and weaknesses of both rural and urban views are exposed. The church has a definite responsibility to guide the intergation of differences and interests among rural and urban people.

It is important for a pastor to be sensitive to the interests of rural communities. People tend to be open to changes in their life when they sense their present philosophy, methodology, and value systems have been understood and respected. It is not difficult for rural people to see the reasons for change. What they need, beyond that knowledge, is encouragement, sensitivity, and developed leadership. This will enable them to shape their future while respecting their past. Residents of rural communities are not happy with the population growth in their area. Long-established congregations are not pleased to see their young people moving away from home. They are not overjoyed to have urban people living next door. These are very drastic changes for communities that, twenty-five years ago, were centered around one industry--farming. Now, the people are surrounded by a hodge-podge of interests and ventures; yet, they know these changes will never go away. With a little understanding and help, rural communities will dream dreams and take advantage of these changing times. They can blend the strengths and plans of the new and urban people into a hopeful tomorrow. My pastoral leadership in a rural congrega-

tion is strengthened by my sense of the tensions and struggles involved in making such changes.

Some personal qualities are a result of my rural background. The ability to be independent and yet cooperate with other people can be developed in most contexts; however, observing how my Dad and neighboring farmers worked together, helping each other (but not interfering with each other's independence), has given me insight into the values of a shared ministry. Everyone benefitted by working together. Each person's help was appreciated and important, producing a team effort. Team ministry in congregations also is essential--those same cooperating principles must be involved. The pastor and the people are best advised to work together, planning ministry, respecting each other's abilities, and faithfully doing their part for the good of all. My rural background prepares me to understand and employ team ministry, a necessary methodology for local church integration.

Values of My Urban Experiences

My twelve years in an urban invironment began in 1960. City life was enjoyable and the reasons people are attracted to urban living became obvious. There is constant action in the city--always something to do. The steady flow of cars and trucks on the streets and freeways symbolize this action. The continuous noise gives the impression that the city never sleeps. Along with this mobility, comes the verifying evidence that life is always changing. Roads are under construction, neighborhoods are altered or rebuilt, new buildings and corporations spring up overnight. People never have to wait long (so it seems) for life to change and have a new look. On the other hand, life is much

different in rural communities. There is an almost erie stillness, especially at night. The wheels of change turn slowly. Adjusting to these differences is most real (and often difficult). Urban people must face such changes when migrating to rural communities.

A city provides variety and opportunity for each family member. There are jobs and training programs in great abundance. Any person can find an activity to meet any interest or need. Large city schools provide numerous study opportunities. Colleges and universities are often nearby. Residents may attend a large church or a small church. A kalidescope of faith experiences is always available. Urban sectors provide opportunities in quantity, while rural communities, by necessity, must focus on quality activities. People moving from the city to rural communities often experience a vacume of opportunities.

Conveniences are abundant in urban communities. Needed products are available in numerous stores. Shopping around for the best price is always possible. Malls are nearby, open daily 'til 9:00 P.M. and Sundays 'til 5:00 P.M. Restaurants, serving fast or elegant foods, provide eating possibilities to answer every appetite. Health care and medical specialities are available. Newspapers, radio, and television stations provide music and entertainment. A variety of cultural events, parks, and recreational opportunities beckon to be enjoyed. Such urban conveniences are very attractive and are often missed when migrating to a rural community.

Personal privacy is another attraction of city living. People often do not know their next door neighbor. Persons are usually unknown in the local shopping malls and left to themselves. The same is

true while eating in a restaurant. In a city, anyone can be his/her own person and not be singled out by others. The city creates an impersonal environment, resulting in the possibility of making choices freely without everyone's approval. This privacy is soon lost or held in suspicion in a rural community. My years of both city and country living provide an understanding of the feelngs created as urban and rural people settle in the same community.

Ripe For New Opportunities

My rural and urban backgrounds are valuable because they allow me to be sensitive to the different patterns of living. Rural folks may think there is no harm in leaving a delivery on the kitchen table when no one is home; urban people may feel this is an invasion of privacy. Urban people like to put a fence around their yard; rural folk tend to interpret such action as a sign of unfriendliness. Urban folks expect the availability of services such as water and sewer, garbage pickup, and fire/police protection; rural people have, on their own, cared for most of these needs and resent the added tax to provide any extra community services.

Experiencing both rural and urban environments has increased my awareness of these differences in living styles. Integration of living patterns is essential when rural communities experience the mixture of urban and rural persons. Such changing communities need specialized treatment and programing. The church can be a leader in designing needed steps to create a cohesive rurban community. This project offers an opportunity to test my identity with (and skill for) integrating urban and rural people in a long-time-rural congregation.

CHAPTER III

THE SPECIAL NATURE OF NORTH BRANCH

A Brief History

American Indians of the Chippewa Tribe were the first inhabitants of this area. A few burial mounds remain within the village of North Branch. Area farms have Indian names on their land deeds. European people began living in this area in 1854. Some land was cleared and the following year the families joined these pioneers. The village was founded in 1855 under the name Beacherville. The North Branch Methodist Protestant Church was chartered that same year. Lumbering and fur trading industries were the first centers for commerce. To provide for the families in this small community, farming soon became the dominant occupation, supported by light industry. In the 1960's, the auto industry grew as a source of income, due to the good, low cost transportation. To this day, local people choose to live in the North Branch area and commute to the auto plants in Flint and Pontiac. People from other cities, including Detroit, also have moved to this area while maintaining their city employment. North Branch, once proud of its hibernation from the rest of the world, is being forced to enter a new age. The gradual migration of city people to this area means life will never be as it was thirty years ago.

A Rural Community Engulfed in Change

Beacherville, later named North Branch, grew rapidly and by 1883 numbered nine hundred persons. Since that time, the population of the village has ranged between nine hundred and one thousand. The United States census records explain a different story for Lapeer County and the townships surrounding North Branch. Lapeer County numbered 1,332 people in 1980, a 36.35 percent increase over the population in 1960. The map in Figure 1 identifies the distribution of that growth among the townships.

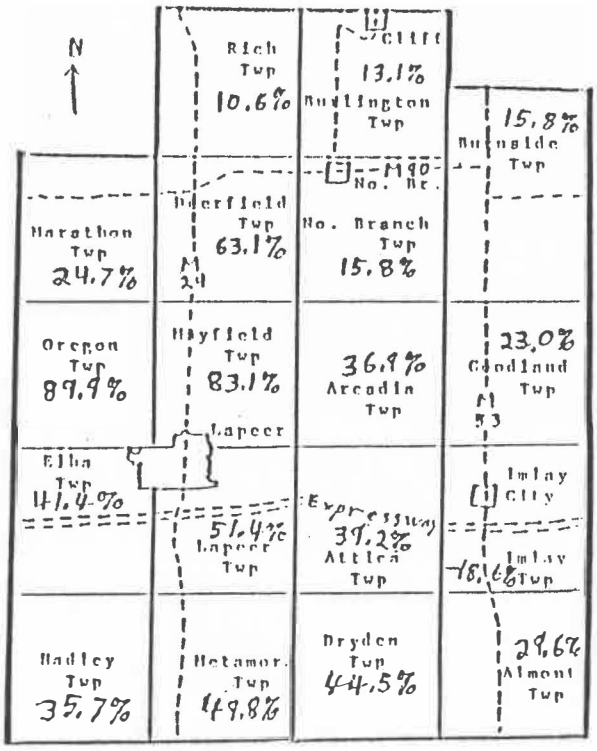


Figure 1: Lapeer County & Townships. Percentages reflect population changes, 1960-1980, per United States census records.

The figure within each township reflects its percentage of total population growth. The townships along M-24 highway record the greatest growth, the southern townships come in second, and the townships bordering M-53 are third in population increases. The most northern and eastern townships report growth, but at a smaller rate. From 1960 to 1980, the State of Michigan reports an average of 9.26 percent population growth. Lapeer County is not the fastest growing county in Michigan, but it is growing at a significant rate in comparison to other population areas.

The North Branch Area

The extent of this growth for North Branch is best understood by examining the surrounding townships. Table 2 provides those figures.

Table 2. Population Count by Period, Surrounding Townships

Townships	1960	1970	% Change	1980	% Change	1985*	% Change*	% Change
Rich	1022	1172	14.7	1249	6.6	1273	1.05	0.88
Burlington	1222	1423	16.4	1562	9.8	1585	1.00	0.96
Clifford		472		406	-14.0	397	-0.39	1.20
Deerfield	1760	2713	54.1	4672	72.2	4828	6.90	7.18
North Branch	2029	2277	12.2	2721	19.5	2871	6.63	4.77
North Branch Village		932		896	- 3.9	975	3.49	1.50
Burnside	1322	1506	13.9	1772	17.7	1842	3.10	2.35
Mayfield	2125	3645	71.5	7098	94.7	7316	9.65	10.96
Arcadia	1253	1666	33.0	2347	40.9	2444	4.28	3.72
Goodland	1013	1261	24.5	1531	21.6	1552	0.79	1.02

* = estimated

Source: United States Census Records

Most townships record their greatest growth from 1970 to 1980. More significant is the population growth in the townships contained within the North Branch School District. Figure 2 outlines this area.

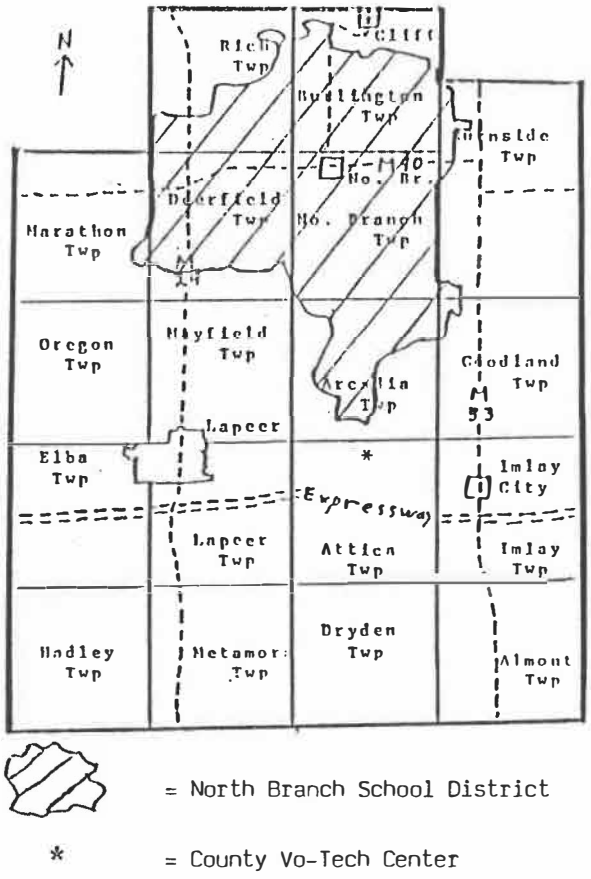


Figure 2. North Branch School District

Table 2 (page 18) figures show North Branch Township recording a 12.2 percent population increase from 1960 to 1970, and a 19.5 percent increase from 1970 to 1980. Deerfield Township is almost entirely in the North Branch School District. This township boasted a 54.1 percent and a 72.2 percent population growth in the two ten-year periods.

Arcadia Township, with one-half its area contained in the school district, increased in residents by 40.9 percent. Rich and Burlington Townships reported smaller percentage increase, but they both grew at a rate greater than Michigan's 9.26 percent! This Doctor of Ministry Project is fueled by these population facts. Is the North Branch congregation equipped to meet the challenges implied by an area nursing a population growth? What steps can the congregation best initiate to attract families moving into the townships contained by the school district?

School Enrollment Sharpens the Focus

One final statistic brings to light the market area for the North Branch Congregation. Table 3 gives the Lapeer County School Enrollment by school districts. The years since 1980 are the most important to note.

Table 3. Lapeer County School Enrollment

Districts	61-62	70-71	80-81	81-82	82-83	83-84	84-85	85-86	86-87
North Branch	1447	2096	2450	2361	2314	2275	2290	2317	2335
Lapeer Comm.	3961	6322	8776	8395	8388	8222	8027	8021	7998
Lapeer Inter.			295	302	273	244	229	191	177
Imlay City	1477	2246	2226	2172	2010	1986	1933	1957	1928
Almont	805	1206	1474	1422	1400	1346	1301	1299	1318
Dryden	503	713	742	707	675	673	714	677	677
Non-public			581	714	800	794	790	700	646
Total	8193	12583	16544	16073	15860	15540	15284	15162	15079

Source: Lapeer County Intermediate School System

All Lapeer school districts, except nonpublic, peaked in enrollment by 1980. Then decline set in and continued for all districts. North Branch, however, shows a school increase from 1983-84 to 1984-85 and is the only district to maintain an increase each year thereafter. The rising North Branch School enrollment means families with school age children are responsible for part of the population growth experienced in the School District townships. The North Branch United Methodist Church continues to be given the opportunity of a young and increasing population for its membership. These new families appear to come to North Branch from urban or nonrural communities. North Branch is another prime location of a new cultural entity, rurbia. This community is gradually experiencing the dynamics of change brought, in part, by the migration of new settlers to this land!

CHAPTER IV

THE NORTH BRANCH CONGREGATION

Trends From History

The North Branch Congregation was organized in 1856 following a year of Sunday School home classes. The first resident pastor came in the fall of 1856. Three years later, the congregation had a membership of one hundred. The church met in those first years in a variety of village buildings. A frame structure was erected in 1876 on the present Sherman and Huron Street location. The current brick and stone edifice was dedicated in August of 1902 with an elaborate jubilee service. The congregation is of the Methodist Episcopal tradition.

Along with its rural nature, the North Branch congregation demonstrated a missional and integrative capacity. During the early 1800's a branch church was erected on land three and one-half miles west of town. The church, named St. John's, was served by the pastor of the mother congregation. The "country" church eventually dwindled in membership and in 1927 became a part of the village church. With the formation of the Methodist Protestant Denomination in 1939, the Bottom Creek and East Deerfield churches entered a circuit relationship with North Branch. The two smaller churches later closed and merged with the village congregation.

In contrast to other North Branch congregations, the Methodist church is known for its spirit of cooperation and unity. Their history speaks of a willingness to integrate new persons into their community of faith. The congregation has consistently demonstrated a strong self-image. This is best seen in its care for the church buildings. As earlier noted, the present edifice was dedicated in 1902. There were three hundred members in 1900 who sacrificed to pay in full for their building by the date of its dedication. In the years following, the congregation has practiced good maintenance policies. Protective windows were installed over the stained glass windows in the 1970's. As these words are being written, the congregation has completed a brick tuck and cleaning project. The interior is painted as needed and the downstairs walls are beautifully maintained with wood paneling. The sanctuary is beautiful, often motivating new residents to attend a worship service. The care of the building suggests a genuine concern and response to a basic Christian responsibility for ministry with one another.

Analyzing Membership Patterns

The North Branch congregation experienced a gradual membership growth for its first one hundred years. Families generally had numerous children. With few social opportunities available, families allowed the church to be central in their activities. Young people married and settled in the immediate community. Generations of families lived in this community and attended the North Branch Methodist congregation. Membership roles were, therefore, replenished and enlarged with little recruitment effort. The North Branch Methodist

Protestant Church, a rural congregation, relished the consistency of such cultural patterns.

The 1950's spun new webs for the established North Branch congregation. Each generation had fewer children per family. Grown sons and daughters found employment in distant places. More and more long-time church families had no adult off-spring in the congregation. Families did not replenish the church roles. Other churches were in competition to attract families entering the community. Membership recruitment became a significant issue. Has North Branch risen to meet the challenge? Uncertain answers were gained from a membership study. Table 4 charts the North Branch United Methodist Church Membership, average worship attendance, Sunday School enrollment, and average Sunday School attendance.

Table 4. Statistics for North Branch United Methodist Church

Source: Detroit Conference Journals

Church membership grew steadily from 1955, peaking at 408 members in 1971. This growth represents a 28.9 percent net gain! The North Branch township population increases did not reach those percentages, as reflected in Table 2 (page 18). The membership gain for the North Branch congregation is impressisve through 1971. The following years, however, tell a very different story--a reverse in membership statistics. From 1971 to 1978, the membership sadly registered a -17.5 percent decline. At the same time, 1970 to 1980, the North Branch population grew by 19.5 percent. One surrounding township, Deerfield, experienced a 72.2 percent increase. The church membership status could be acceptable if the recorded members had remained near the 1971 numbers. All other statistics, however, in Table 4 reflect a similar declining pattern. The diminishing statistics for the North Branch United Methodist Church are in startling contrast with the constant population growth for each surrounding township!

Identifying the decline is easy, finding the reason is complicated. The membership statistics through 1987 describe a stabilized membership with a slight increase, then a small decline in the last two years. A study of how people entered the church from 1960 to 1986 discovers 264 entries joined on profession of faith and transfer. During the same year, a total of 220 youth participated in confirmation classes. Were significant new members coming through the large numbers in confirmation classes? Further study finds youth did attend the confirmation classes, without becoming church members. Adults were the significant majority of the 264 new members. Membership declined through the twenty-six years because the number of incoming

members did not equal the outward migration. By 1970, American families were beginning to move every two to three years. This mobility is understood in urban churches and membership recruitment is a constant program. The North Branch United Methodist Church is gradually understanding how the previously abundant family network is no longer meeting the need for new members.

Adult membership recruitment must increase. Improving skills in integrating urban and rural background people can help the recruitment program in this rurban setting.

Membership Profile and Distribution

A brief membership and leadership study will complete the analysis of the North Branch United Methodist Congregation. Table 5 describes a healthy church from the perspective of an age-sex pyramid for membership and worship attendance. The majority of the membership and worship attendance is among people forty years of age and younger. The graph lines show no indentations or serious plunges. The congregation appears, however, to lose people in the twenty to thirty age range. They frequently move from the area for employment. The inner lines on the graph, the nonmember worship attendance record, reflect a small number of people in contrast to the United States census records showing consistent population gains to the surrounding townships. Inasmuch as the yearly membership rolls are decreasing since 1971 (Table 4, page 24), the nonmember attenders are not in large enough numbers to be joining as members. The congregation needs to address this situation, move from being a traditional, family-oriented congregation, and increase their efforts to attract new community residents.

Table 5. Membership Age-Sex Pyramid

The residence and distance people travel to church is one remaining important data source, as indicated in Table 6.

Table 6. Residence/Distance from Church

	MEMBERS				NONMEMBERS			
	Indiv.	%	Active*	%	Indiv.	%	Active*	%
Living in Town	101	30.0	87	33.0	14	24.0	7	2.0
Under 20 Miles	177	51.0	145	54.5	42	70.0	25	75.0
Over 20 miles	20	6.0	13	5.0	0	0	0	0
In Michigan	19	5.0	12	4.0	3	3.0	3	23.0
Out of State	27	8.0	9	3.5	2	3.0	0	0
Totals	344	100.0	266	100.0	61	100.0	35	100.0

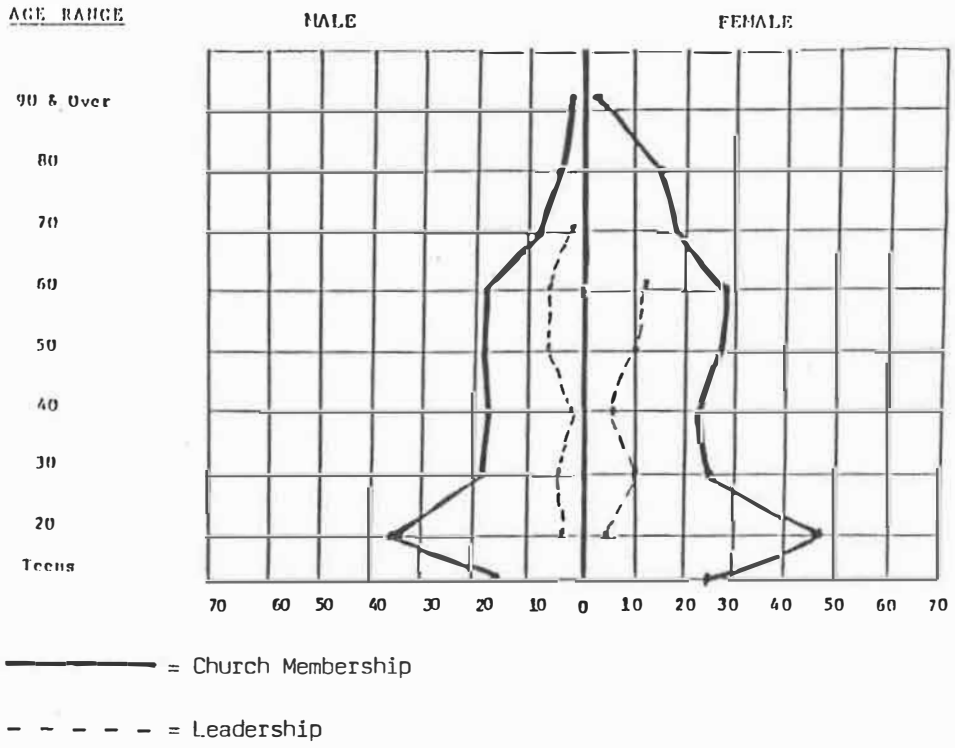
* = Attending and/or contributing

Eighty-one percent of the members live within twenty miles of the church sactuary. These members represent 87.5 percent of the active numbers in the congregation. People are placed in the "active" category by attending Sunday worship at least six times per year, by making a financial contribution, or by having their children regularly in Sunday School. The members listed as "active" and "living in town" are surprisingly only 33 percent of the congregation. People are willing to travel for their church affiliation! Fifty-four percent of the active members reside outside the village of North Branch, implying that some of them live in townships experiencing phenominal population growth. The North Branch Congregation has a broadening market area for new attenders and members. The congregation needs to improve recruitment programs. Urban and rural differences may be one of the barriers between long-time and new community residents.

Leadership Profiles

Table 7 graphs the North Branch church membership and age-sex profile of the church leadership for the year 1986. Members of the following groups are counted in the leadership profile: Administrative Board, Council on Ministries, Board of Trustees, Pastor/Parish Relations, Nominating Committee, Sunday chool Administrators, and Sunday School Teachers.

Table 7. Leadership/Membership/Age-Sex Pyramid



The majority of leadership roles are held by members over fifty years of age. There are more women than men holding the leadership positions. The few number of leaders under age forty are mostly women.

The absence of younger leadership may be explained by the involvement of young people in high energy community organizations, such as Volunteer Ambulance and Fire Departments. Other members give time to the American Legion, Masonic and Eastern Star orders, and to the village/township governments. Except for the twenty and forty age groups, the leadership profile somewhat represents the age-sex pattern of church membership.

The membership and leadership statistics appear to describe a healthy church. The ages of leaders and their new or long-time affiliation with the church was presented in Chapter I. According to statistics, 25 percent of the leaders have been church participants for less than ten years. New people appear to be well represented in the church leadership core. In reality, however, except for a few new people, records show they seldom attend Administrative and Council on Ministries meetings. By default, not by election, the long-time, family-related people form the key decision-making group for the church. When new people have generated ideas or suggestions, they are often silenced by picky questions or outright statements from long-time members, "We tried that here once before!" In reality, the long-time family members hold control in significant decisions and policies. New people are not entering the leadership circle. The North Branch area gives all the signs of being a true rurban community as described in Chapter I. The United Methodist Church needs to accept the challenge of integrating new and urban people into the center of its life. Improving awareness and skills in membership recruitment and integration should guarantee a growing, vital United Methodist Church in North Branch far into the future!

CHAPTER V

BASING THE PROJECT ON SOUND THEOLOGY

Theology to support this project was discovered with ease. Theological motives, in fact, were behind the reasons forming my Doctor of Ministry studies. The Bible describes God, architect of the universe, as one seeking to have each person enter into a redemptive relationship with the Creator of the universe. Each person has a definite ability to sense and relate with God. All people who respond to God share in carrying out God's plans. The church becomes that collective fellowship, the body of Christ, the physical presence of God living within humankind. All believers are fitted together by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God working among people, in developing unity to fulfill the redemptive mission of God. The Bible, therefore, prescribes the nature of this fellowship to focus on integrating people together into one worshipping and working body. To bring this integration focus to reality, the United Methodist Church has held to a belief in the priesthood of all believers, as did its founder, John Wesley, in 1784. These supportive themes from theology were consistently relevant during the project in one-to-one discussions, sermons, and church group life. This chapter will describe the sections of theology most emphasized during the project.

The Seeking Nature of God

The life of the church centers around God's love. The message of the church is one of God's love for each person, a love reaching beyond anyone's imagination. God's love seeks to bring each person into an intimate and continuous relationship. Human nature tends to oppose God's love. But once accepting God's love, each person experiences a deep joy and happiness. In gratitude to such a compassionate God, the believer seeks to develop an intimate relationship with that being. This includes attempts to explain God's great love to other people. The growing relationship with God is greatly enriched through involvement in a community where people are likewise responding to God's love. This happens, not because of any human motives, but, because a self-giving nature lies at the center of this loving God.

The Christian story of God's seeking nature begins with the people of Israel. These people, through their patriarchs, felt befriended by a power outside of and greater than any combined human spirit. It is interesting to note how every culture senses this power beyond themselves and develops some worship structure in response. The Israelites received unique attention from this power, named "God," and over centuries developed a profound understanding of the ingredients of faith and allegiance with God.

The Old Testament records the experiences of the Israelites as they came to know and worship God. Their patriarchs wandered into Egypt and became a large slave force for the nation. The Israelites cried out to God from the agony of the slave conditions. God heard and called them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron.

They eventually conquered the peoples around the Jordan valley and established a nation. This God of the universe appears to seek and shape a particular people to develop a redemptive destiny between God and all peoples. Signs and wonders executed by God in favor of the Israelites convinced them of God's intent to shape them into a special people. The Israelites accepted the requirement to worship and trust God, and only God, in all their dealings. Yet, with uncountable frequency, they broke their allegiance with this caring God. In such experiences, a true nature of God is discovered. God continued to seek them out, to forgive the Israelites and reestablish the God-human alliance and destiny. God always develops a way to bring at least a remnant back into a redemptive, trusting, and loving divine-human relationship. Out of this nation, came the event to become the means of redemption for all people--the birth of Jesus Christ--the result of Israel's destiny. Jesus explained and modeled the seeking nature of God in a manner more complete than any other person. The New Testament records the life of Jesus, and the explanations he provides of the nature of God.

Jesus Christ gave numerous stories describing God's nature. The best remembered explanations are given in three stories or parables, "The Lost Sheep," "The Lost Coin," and "The Lost Son," recorded in the gospel of Luke, Chapter Fifteen. In the first parable, a sheep left the flock and went its own way, avoiding the watchful eye of the shepherd and the guard of the sheep dogs. This sheep was responsible for its action, and once on its own, became inescapably lost. The shepherd (God), found and brought back the lost sheep (person), expressing great relief and happiness.

In the second parable, a woman lost one of ten silver coins. The coin, an inanimate object, bore no responsibility for its lost condition. Further, the coin did not know it was helplessly lost. The woman (God) went into every dark and distant corner to find the lost treasure and, recovering the coin (person), expressed intense happiness.

The third parable, the father and his two sons, explains God's nature in response to common and opposite personalities. The younger son asked the father for his share of the family estate. He then left and "wasted" his inheritance. The son became hopelessly lost and unable to care for his own needs. During this same time, the father had been yearning for his son to return. "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). Again, God is pictured as searching and feeling compassion for the rebellious sinner, receiving the repentent person with intense happiness. The elder son portrays an opposite personality. He stays home, works for his father, and expresses no joy, no forgiveness, for his penitent brother. The father refuses to be angry with his self-righteous son, but pleades with him, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours" (Luke 15:31). God did not reject, but continued to offer compassion and inclusion to both sons. A second feast will take place when the elder son comes to his senses and receives his younger brother with open love. God's compassion and love reaches unendingly to every person.

Experiencing the self-giving nature of God, no persons can be concerned only with themselves. Each person becomes aware that God goes on searching, persuading people to return to experience His love. In turn, that person becomes the hands, the feet, the ambassador for God, presenting the message of God's search to reconcile the world back into favor with God (2 Corinthians 5:19). All believers have been given the responsibility to carry forth this message of reconciliation coming from God's loving and self-giving nature. By actively assuming this responsibility, the believers give birth to the love of God becoming alive and personal in the human community.

God's Searching Continues Through People

Part of the task of the believer is to identify the people for whom God searches with endless compassion. The lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7, are people who, at one time, were reconciled in God's love. Later in life they choose not to develop their faith--they leave the fold and follow their own plans for life. The lost sheep resembles people who become angry with God, and often through their own avoidance, are slow to resolve their hostility. The coin of the second parable, Luke 15:8-10, parallels children or youth whose parents have no belief, therefore, do not encourage their family to choose faith in God. Others are innocent of their lost condition to God--numerous occurences keep them from understanding their need for salvation. Finally, millions of people are innocently lost to God because they have never heard the Good News. The church is responsible to carry on God's compassionate searching for people lost to God, regardless of whether those persons are or are not responsible for their condition.

Every generation has examples of the younger and elder son or daughter, those who shun advice or experience and choose to set up life on their own terms. Their career, or hunger for money, consumes all their time and energy. By personal choice, all other interests are pushed aside, including growth in a close relationship with God. The elder son or daughter is often modeled by people who attend Christian activities, yet, whose attitudes and values do not demonstrate an intimate relationship with God. Some believers judge themselves to be good people; therefore, they expect God to bless and favor them. The younger and elder sons or daughters clearly need the loving and forgiving Father portrayed in Luke 15:11-32. The community of believers must be intentional in persuading persons to reconcile with God. This same community, with equal commitment, encourages drifting believers to recommitment their lives to God. In this way, Christians are to respond after the model given in God's tireless compassion. The believers, together, become the center of both the motive and the environment where people are encouraged to accept and develop an intimate relationship with this great God. This fellowship becomes one way the love of God is alive and personal in the human community.

There is another need, often forgotten by believers. Each person must be reminded of the danger of being the lost sheep or the lost coin. Any person can be the straying younger son or daughter, or the self-righteous one remaining at home. No person has an advantage over any other individual. Even though a believer has experienced God's love and forgiveness and has, therefore, been released from past sin, he/she can still wander away from God. Again and again, Christians

must seek God's forgiveness and recommit their lives. The tireless compassion and searching nature of God is something both believers and nonbelievers continually need and can experience. There is good reason to be eternally grateful for God's love and faithfulness! God's self-giving nature becomes both the center of worship and the motive to shape a congregation's outreach and mission.

God's Self-giving Nature Resulted in Jesus Christ

God's loving and self-giving nature has been experienced by people of all generations and cultures. They sense the searching, calling nature of the universe's power--God. Religions come about as an attempt to respond to God. A certain people, the Israelites, uniquely experienced the presence of God. Their encounters reveal God's numerous self-disclosures. The Israelites began to comprehend God's love, a power seeking to lead people of all nations to worship and love God (Jeremiah 3:17). Finally, into the midst of the Israelite people, God came in human form, providing an understandable message of the seeking and loving nature of God.

God became flesh and lived for a while in the personage of Jesus Christ. Although this happened two thousand years ago in Palestine, the effect of God living on earth is still felt today. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God in human form, reverses the result of destruction and death, the destiny for human life trusting its own devices. The man Jesus, explains the divine path of reconciliation needed to bring humanity and God back together. This plan of reconciliation brings with it the possibilities of re-creation and eternal life for each believer. Now, there is no guess work about

God's wishes; there is no need for theories about the power or force trying to reach us. There is a loving and self-giving God, revealed in Jesus Christ, tirelessly seeking to develop an intimate relationship with each person. This self-giving nature becomes the sole, generating force for programs explaining salvation, promoting outreach and member integration as the essence of purpose for individual and collective societies of believers. God is real, in human form, compelling each believer to take this Good News into every corner of human life.

The Identity of Jesus Christ

There are numerous reasons to motivate a congregation to adopt programs to evangelize and/or integrate people into the Christian fellowship. The Great Commission, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19) leaves little debate. The need to replenish the membership roles puts some congregations to work. People are hurting and are in need of caring, nondestructive guidance. The Christian faith is the best foundation for guiding and shaping human life, and from the sheer joy of learning this, Christians are motivated to tell and demonstrate their story. But this reason is not the prime motive. Samuel Southard addresses this issue in his book, Pastoral Evangelism. Personal or congregational evangelism is a dominating Christian activity for a single reason:

> I believe that the strength and shape of personal evangelism is in the statement of St. John, 'the Word became flesh and truth' (John 1:14). This is one of the classical texts for an incarnational theology. God entered human history in the form of a man; salvation has come to

> us through a person. This is then the classic text for evangelism, for if God acted in history, we must act. If He spoke through his Son upon earth, then, we must speak like him. Personal evangelism is made possible and impelled by this teaching that God moves through us beause he has made salvation personal (Southard, 1981, p. 12).

If God acted, believers must act. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the sole reason to explain and live this message with neighbors and people around the world.

The Incarnation of God

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, born into humanity, and the Savior of all creation. Jesus is capable of bringing human restoration with God, as God has planned. There are many signs confirming Jesus as both divine and human--God in human form. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all record the powers of Jesus to heal (Matthew 8:5-13), to calm a storm (Mark 4:35-41), to give food to thousands of people (Luke 9:10-17), and to raise people from death (John 11:1-44). Jesus has power over evil spirits (Matthew 8:16), expelling those spirits and causing people to question "Were Jesus and Beelzebub [the devil] one and the same?" (Luke 11:14-22). Jesus performed these and other acts because, as Jesus explained, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Such signs are to lead people to believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

The response of evil spirits believed to be present in people healed by Jesus is a striking sign of the uniqueness of Jesus. In one example, the spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). In another example, the spirit called Jesus

the "Son of the Most High God" (Luke 8:28). In another, when people brought a mute boy to Jesus, the spirit threw the boy into a convulsion (Mark 9:20) as a sign of recognizing Jesus. The evil spirits understood Jesus as their enemy, able to control their activities. Jesus, appearing to be human, is "one of a kind."

Jesus, More Than Human

The transfiguration experience (Matthew 17:1-13), points to the divinity of Jesus. Peter, James, and John may not have understood all of the significance at the time of this mountain top experience. In the years after the resurrection of Jesus, these three disciples looked back and realized the voice they had heard was God, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:5). The transfiguration ties Jesus to Moses and Elijah, the great leaders of Israel, and gives suggestion of both his divinity and his humanity. The same voice and words were heard at his baptism (Luke 3:22).

The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:18-40, John 12:12-19), is also an important sign. It links Jesus to the promises suggested by the prophets of Israel. They had faith that God would one day send salvation. The Daughter of Zion is an image from Zechariah 9:9 and Isaiah 62:11 of a helpless people, although in exile and completely vulnerable, watching in faith for the imminent salvation of God. In the triumphant entry narrative, the Gospel writers quote Zechariah because he is noted for encouraging the Israelites to regain their hope in God. They were to

rebuild the temple of Jerusalem (Ezra 5:1-2), because God would one day fulfill a marvelous promise. The term "Son of David," refers to the promise of Jeremiah: "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous branch shoot from David's line. He will do what is just and right in the land" (Jeremiah 33:15). God will send a ruler who "will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). The people, therefore, following Jesus on his way into Jerusalem, were overjoyed. They were reminded of Zechariah's promise from God, "'For I am coming, and I will live among you,' declares the Lord" (Zechariah 2:10). Finally, the promise given by Isaiah of the nature of this Wonderful Counselor hints of a ruler who would be more than human. This person would establish a kingdom, "upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever" (Isaiah 9:7). No human being can possibly rule forever. Such a perfect reign would never happen unless the ruler was divine--God in human form. Jesus entered Jerusalem as a ruler, riding on a donkey (a symbol of one coming in peace), expressing a humble, gentle, and righteous nature. Jesus came as the fulfillment of God's promise to the people; Jesus came to rule forever and must, therefore, be divine.

The example of Jesus healing a paralytic man (Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26), very convincingly point to the unity of God and Jesus. Jesus is surrounded by a large crowd, so four men lower their paralytic friend to Jesus through a hole in the roof. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven'" (Luke 5:20). The man did not go to have his sins forgiven; he came to be healed. What follows in response, brings proof of the divinity of Jesus. The

Pharisees and teachers of the law mumbled, "Why does this fellow talk like this? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). There is very sound logic behind their statement; sins are committed against God--therefore, only God can forgive sins. For a human to forgive sins means taking God's place. This man is, therefore blaspheming God. What Jesus does in healing the paralytic's condition changes their logic. Again, only God forgives sins. People, then, believed the paralytic's condition was the result of sin committed somewhere in his life. Jesus evidently forgives sins, because the paralytic got up and walked away. Jesus, therefore, must be God or at least Jesus is letting the power of God work through him. The clinching fact of the divinity of Jesus in this example is the response of the people. Other times, after a miracle, people argue with Jesus (Matthew 9:34), or try to arrest him (Mark 3:6), but in this case, each Gospel writer reports, "This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying 'We have never seen anything like this!'" (Mark 2:12). The Pharisees and teachers of the law present that day began to believe in the divinity of Jesus (Luke 5:17). Jesus is the Son of God, divine, but revealed in the likeness of humanity.

Jesus, In Touch With Human Kind

The Bible stories report numerous facts about the nature and activities of Jesus, each in turn pointing to the conclusion of his humanity. Jesus begins as a fetus in the womb of Mary. Her relative, Elizabeth, exclaims, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" (Luke 1:42). It can be assumed that the child

was in Mary's womb for nine months, as Luke 2:6 reports, "The time came for the baby to be born." Both Matthew and Luke meticulously record the geneology for Jesus. Luke writes in human terms that "the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40-52). Luke is careful to point out that Jesus lived in obedience with his parents, Joseph and Mary. The eyewitness writers are convinced of the humanity of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke report how Jesus is tempted like every other person. The mystery is that, in each case, Jesus never yields to sin. One of the disciples, Peter, writes how "He [Jesus] committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (I Peter 2:22). The Apostle Paul writes that "God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be a sin offering for us, so in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21). The deciples use these descriptions to show how difficult it is to reconcile the sinless life with the humanity of Jesus. Yet, the disciples know the humanity of Jesus was a reality. By their writings, the disciples want all people to recognize the truth of the humanity of Jesus.

The death of Jesus on a cross is described as a very human event by each of the four Gospel writers. This death presents a strong proof of the humanity of Jesus. At the moment of his death, the curtain of the temple is reported to be torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). This is a human symbol representing the end of the separation between God and humanity, possible because Jesus, the Son of God, cames to earth and dies on a cross--both human activities. Jesus Christ is human and divine at the same time. Jesus understands

human nature; therefore, Jesus can become every person's point of entry or reentry into God's fellowship.

The Resurrection: Something More

People read the stories about Jesus and conclude that he was a great man--and nothing more. Such statements are made without considering the final happening in the life and death of Jesus. The resurrection stories finally give the meaning of what Jesus came to accomplish. All four Gospel writers record the appearances of Jesus to his disciples and friends after the third day of his death upon a cross. Then, for a length of time, Jesus gives numerous convincing proofs of being alive (Acts 1:3). Paul reported in 1 Corinthians 5:6 the appearance of Jesus to five hundred people at one time. Surely, that many people are not being fooled. Jesus comes back to life--the final sign of the power of God and the divinity of Jesus. Jesus was and is capable of being the Savior of all creation.

What evidence will persuade a belief in the resurrection of Jesus? Consider the disciples. They followed Jesus for three years. He showed great promise of being capable of designing the end of Rome's cruel power over Isreal. Then Jesus foolheartedly walked into their trap and was hung on a cross until death. The disciples were devestated, confused, and dejected by this sudden turn of events. It was only the truth that turned the confused disciples into the confident, convincing, tellers of God's love--proven finally in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This man of Nazareth is God in human form, living on earth to explain the way for people to be restored to a relationship with God. This entire plan of Jesus' death and resurrec-

tion had to be of God or else it would have failed (Acts 5:38-39). The Romans, the Jews, the evil of this world all tried to stop the phenomenal growth of believers in Jesus Christ--to no avail. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the son of humanity, capable of being the Savior of all creation.

Promises of the Divine Son of God

The preceding description of Jesus Christ presents the proof that Jesus is the Son of God. These reasons give cause to believe the promises of Jesus for they begin their source in the nature of God. Jesus states, "I am in the Father [God] and the Father is in me" (John 14:10). Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Way, the Truth, and the Life for all humanity, the Good Shepherd, the gate for the sheep (John 10:7). Jesus, as Messiah, did go to prepare a place, a heaven, for all who believe in him. He will return to take all believers to be with him and God.

Jesus began another promise by calling himself "the vine of God," with all disciples being the branches (John 15:1-8). The old Testament often calls Israel "the vineyard of God" (Isaiah 5:7). Abraham believed his offspring would become a blessing to all families of the earth (Genesis 12:3). Jesus, the Messiah, is God's true product from Israel; therefore, Jesus is God's salvation--the blessing to all nations. Followers receive strength and life from Jesus Christ, the vine. This image also applies to the Church, the collective body of believers in Jesus Christ. The life of the Church is discovered through its complete dependency on Jesus, the risen Christ. The fruit, human reconciliation with God, will result as the life of Jesus

passes through the Church, transmitting the message of the Good News of God's compassion. This message leads people to the point of receiving the means of salvation--Jesus Christ--the Messiah. Finally, "Go and make disciples of all nations," is filled with the strength of his promise, "and surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). The emphasis of the Church, therefore, is to evangelize and nurture people as disciples of Jesus Christ. The living Christ, head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22), supervises the fulfillment of the commission to discipleship.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:18). Unresolved hurts and sins place heavy guilt upon each person. As seen in the healing of the paralytic (Luke 5:17-26), Jesus forgives and promises to remove those burdens. By this forgiveness, all persons can be whole within themselves, with God, and with the world. Jesus, as Messiah, frees each believer through his love and compassion. The event of Jesus, especially his death on the cross, is consistent with the tirelessly compassionate nature of God.

Each believer has the opportunity of bringing the love of God to life by loving others and thus embodying the compassion of God. As the first disciples were grafted into the vine of God, so each believer may receive spiritual strength from Jesus, the risen Christ. Since Jesus and God are one and the same essence through the resurrection event, each follower of Jesus is grafted into the vine of God. Each believer is called to give time and talent to take the Good News of God's love into every corner of human life. The Great Commission,

strengthened by the promise of companionship from Jesus, motivates Christian ministries and develops a theology for the church.

The Church, a Collective Fellowship, the Body of Christ

God, by nature, plans in countless ways to bring all people and created beings into harmony with the self-giving divine love. A nation of people accepted a unique destiny to understand and explain God to all nations. Out of these people, the Israelites, came Jesus, revealing God's love for every person. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christian Church is born. Although Jesus does not organize the church during his public ministry, he does present key elements that later become the bedrock of the Christian Church. One such foundational belief is found in a discussion between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus responds, "On this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:16-18). On this confession, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God," the church is born. This common belief unites all followers in one fellowship with Jesus, the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20) and head of the collective Christian Church (Collossians 1:18).

The Body of Christ

The early followers of Jesus began to assemble together after his ascension (Luke 24:50-53).

> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 4:46-47).

The people began to observe various gifts and Christlike abilities taking place among them. "Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 4:43). Although Jesus was clearly no longer with them, the activities of the collective fellowship were impressively similar to the personage of Jesus. The visible body of Christ on earth (Ephesians 4:12) was now seen in the believers as they joined together in one spirit, while seeking to fulfill the purpose and mission of the Son of God, Jesus, the Christ. It was obvious that other people beyond the apostles were experiencing special gifts of faith. These gifts of healing, wisdom, miraculous powers, and prophecy were present not through increased human effort; instead, the spirit of God was giving spiritual gifts to each person as needed for the common good. As Paul summed up, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27). Each person confessing Jesus to be the Son of God enters into this covenantal relationship with each other and with God (Brewer, et al. 1967, 21-23). Believers become the visible Body of Christ, led and sustained by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Agents on God's Behalf

Each Christian, at the moment he or she accepts the incarnative act complete in Jesus Christ, is welcomed by God into the total Body of Christ. The church, as the Body of Christ, therefore embraces the mission of God, that is bringing all people into harmony with the self-giving, divine love. Each person in the body is a vital link and spiritual force in God's mission. Jesus describes the first responsiblity within God's plan of salvation by inviting his disciples to

become "fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). Just as Jesus invited people to follow him, so each believer today becomes a human agent bidding others to come and be welcomed into the family of God. This privilege of entrance into God's family did not happen easily. It took the death of Jesus Christ to make it possible for any person to change from being an enemy with God to becoming a friend (Romans 5:10). It is, therefore, of utmost importance to respect the invitation from God and present the story of God's great love to as many people as possible. Since Jesus no longer lives in visible form, it becomes each believer's privilege and responsibility to explain the great gift of God in Jesus Christ to fellow humans. The call to evangelize is given to each person and to the collective believers, the church, the Body of Christ.

Through the ages, the task of being "fishers" has been fulfilled in numerous ways. Two issues remain relevent for today: The presentation and invitation to choose faith in God must be given to fellow humans; conditions and needs of the people at the time must be carefully understood for the invitation to be heard. George Hunter speaks of this marketing reality when writing of church growth emphases:

> Church Growth people have known for some time that what counts in Christian mission is not the church's mere 'presence' or 'concern,' but whether hungry people are fed, estranged people are reconciled, injustice is rectified, and lost people are found. Probably no question in mission is more important than the effectiveness of what we do in Christ's name (Hunter 1987, 26).

Knowing people and directly meeting their needs from the Gospel message is the first mandate of the two-part response of being God's agents. The second mandate is incorporating the new converts into the

life and fellowship of a local church. This response is also known as integrating new believers with long-time participants. This second responsibility is as important as the first. Samuel Southard related to this in his study of evangelism patterns of the Baptist denomination. He discovered from a 1953 study that ". . . 48.4 percent of the entire membership of Southern Baptist churches is lost to the cause of Christ" (Southard 1981, 25). The traditional altar call and revival method of gaining new members does not, by itself, integrate the new converts into the local congregations. Southard's book is written to motivate congregations to plan and assume this second responsibility--nurturing new converts. He sees a tendency to ignore this part of evangelism and documents the consistant pattern of ". . . a loss of over half the converts of a revival within a year after they walked down a church isle and were assured of salvation." He concluded, "New converts cannot be built up apart from involvement in the lives of many people" (Southard 1981, 26, 123). God's agents must give the invitation and intentionally remain involved on a personal basis, seeking to integrate each new Christian into the fellowship of the family of God.

Christian Caregiving

The activity of giving both the invitation to faith and integrating the new converts is also known as Christian Caregiving. There is no better expression of caring for a person than to show interest in his/ her relationship with God. What greater gift can a Christian share with another person than explaining how each person can become a friend with God through the life-giving death of Jesus Christ? Seek-

ing to meet all of the needs involved in integrating a new convert is intense Christian caring. As an agent of God and through a church, each believer can find helpful guidance for completing the two-part responsibility inherent in evangelism from the suggestions found in Christian Caregiving foromats. Christians take every advantage to love "because he [God] first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The highest forms of human caring include inviting a person to know Christ and then helping to integrate the new believer in a Christian fellowship. By consistant nature, God models love and thus motivates each follower of Jesus Christ to be actively caring for other people. One caution is necessary. People modeling from God's love may expect their work of caring to convert or cause another person to become integrated with a Christian fellowship. In reality, neither appears to happen and the cared for person comes no closer to God. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." Christians, in their caring, are responsible to "plant" and "water", but the growth of faith or spiritual fruit is God's doing, in God's own time. Kenneth C. Haugk provides an explanation of Christian Caregiving:

> What Christian caregivers do is to prepare the ground for the Great Caregiver. Preparing the ground means doing the best possible job to create a therapeutic situation and then waiting on the Lord expectantly. It is God who provides emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual growth according to his will (Haugk 1984, 19).

With God providing the growth, the agent does not need to be the "super-Christian" or "professional church-person". This point must be made again and again, because church people tend to say, "leave

evangelizing and integrating to the professional clergy." Every believer can, on the other hand, explain how he/she understands the effect of God's love. Believers can demonstrate the presence of God's love because they learn that God is aways with them and can act through them. Jesus, the son of God, promises to be both in and with the caregiver and the care-receiver. Jesus is working in the person in advance and prepares the individual receiving the Christian caring. Jesus stays and follows up to bring the fruit and the growth. Kenneth Haugk sums up this belief in the following:

> The Christian condition is not just Jesus inside you, wonderful as that news is. It is the joy of realizing that Jesus is an objective, supportive presence on the outside as well. He is before you to lead you. He is behind you to guard you. He is beside you that he may support and comfort you. He is above you to bless you. In short, he is with and for you! (Haugk 1984, 153).

May each believer, through prayer and worship, manifest the faith to live this belief!

Indicators in the People Market

God's intense care for each person is demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the son of God. The continuing presence of God, as promised by Jesus (John 14: 16-17), reinforces God's caring nature. As agents in the body of Christ, each believer's motive is to share this caring model in every possible way. To do this, a Christian must know the conditions facing people today and how each factor affects the cared for person. One such condition is the increasing rate people are changing their place of residence. Family, job, and living pressures abound. In these circumstances, people tend to withdraw from community contacts. The common church policy of

having an "open door--you're always welcome" attitude may not motivate new community people to attend worship services. Neighbors must go out of their way to invite new community residents. If they do attend a worship, God's agents must be more intentional and outgoing to help newcomers enter the fellowship. Suzanne G. Braden writes:

> A recent Gallup Poll tells us that 75 percent of us consider ourselves shy, inarticulate, uncomfortable around strangers, and hesitant to place outselves in new situations. For 75 percent of us, attending a congregation's worship for the first few times can be difficult, even terrifying experiences. . . . The very best we can do is to welcome our newcomers warmly, and make follow up calls to get to know them better (Braden 1987, 9).

Present church attenders must break the ice and help newcomers feel included in the worship service. After becoming involved in worship, a most critical time comes when newcomers become members. "Every congregation needs people who sense the call to be close to new members as they move into a fuller relationship with the congregation" (Braden 1987, 10). Christian caregiving becomes most significant in programs designed to integrate new and long-time participants.

Another relavent factor is to recognize that people are "ripe for the gospel" at certain receptive times. For example, when John Wesley came to America for a few months, he found the colonists and Indians unrecptive to his Christian Caregiving. Yet, in England, he could not gather enough human resources to meet the needs of the receptive people. John Wesley explains the receptive issue in his doctrine of prevenient grace--God working beforehand to prepare persons for the gospel's invitation. He also found there is little sure strategy for knowing in advance which person would be responsive, to what degree, and for how long. Christians today are well advised to examine the

principles of receptivity. Such knowledge demonstrates a Christian's acceptance of the responsibility to give the invitation and to integrate the responsive persons into the congregation.

George Hunter, describes five theological insights in identifying receptive people. First, people may not be receptive to the gospel at one given time, but receptivity "waxes and wanes" in persons. This insight lessens a conclusion that certain people are "not elected" by God. Instead, each person can be receptive at some time in his/her life; the trick is to find that moment. A second theological insight is knowing that people do not remain receptive forever. It is urgent to reach people while they are receptive. Third, is the insight that no person is forever unreachable or beyond salvation hope. Fourth, there are no people of major religious or otherwise traditions from whom the gospel story should be withheld. They may have their own faith, but that is no reason to withold the gospel message from them. Fifth, is the insight of "apostolic confidence." Christians sometimes assume they are responsible to prepare, evangelize, and convert people to come to faith in God. Instead, it is the Holy Spirit who prepares people to be receptive to the gospel and the same Spirit leads Christians to them at the receptive moment. The appeal is made through us, while God is responsible for the revelation and conversion. This awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit releases numerous timid Christians to be active in inviting and integrating people into the family of God (Hunter 1987, 70-72, 77-85).

George Hunter lists thirteen receptive indicators that are present in kinship or friendship networks, describing when new church

members tend to be more receptive. New people, for example, are more attracted to new groups and classes, when compared to long-established groups. People tend to be open and searching in populations where religion is growing or where decline is being experienced. "Individuals who have recently lost faith in anything tend to look for something new upon which to form and inform their lives." People experiencing a major cultural change can also be looking for something. Numerous people are open to the gospel of grace when they are dissatisfied with themselves or their lives. Hunter suggests "persons experiencing important life transitions are more receptive than persons in stable periods of life" (Hunter 1987, 80-84).

Finally, Sunday morning visitors are receptive for a period of time. Conclusions from Herb Miller's study, as presented in George Hunter's work, suggest however:

> When someone from the church responds [to a visitor] with a brief, get-acquainted visit within thirty-six hours, about 85 percent of first time visitors return. When the visit is within seventy-two hours, about 60 percent return. Those percentages apply to lay people. When the visit is made by a pastor, the percentages are cut in half (Hunter 1987,86).

Church members appear most effective in touching the receptive moment with newcomers. Responsible Christians must take seriously all attempts to understand the times people are receptive to the invitation and integration of the gospel message.

A Changing World

Because of God's numerous and distinctive acts in human life to demonstrate the compassionate nature of divine love, Christians see their destiny to do all necessary to convince people of God's love.

One generation may reach people through altar calls and revivals; the next generation may find this method ineffective. Christians can take clues from social conditions of an age and adjust their methods of introducing people to God's love and integraing them into a Christian fellowship.

Lyle E. Schaller believes people today experience a different world than just forty years ago. Plans to make inroads in people's lives today must include an understanding of such changing needs. Schaller lists eighteen important conditions of this age. He lists these from the belief that it is harder to be a pastor and an effective congregation today than it was forty years ago. Some of the cultural changes relate to the responsibilities of the membership of the local church. People in America are remarkably mobile in respect to their residence. With this mobility, comes an end to a person's undieing loyalty to one local church or denomination. People exercise freedom of choice; they are more likely to "shop" for a church. Local churches must, therefore, commit themselves to excellence in all programs. A unique ministry brings attention to a local church and may give the new person a point of entry. Each local church needs to develop and promote a focus for their ministry (Schaller 1987, 24-32).

Other changes include a decline in family stability, a higher divorce rate, fewer children per family, couples living together without marriage, and an increasing number of single parent families. Therefore, churches may become less family-centered and more diversified in activities. Worship patterns are changing; social pressures on people to attend are decreasing. The younger generation is less likely to

follow in the footsteps of their parents. The degree of homogeneity in a typical congregation is reduced with the growing affirmation of pluralism. Competition between churches for new members is on the increase. Young and mobile people are specially attracted to "new" churches and "new" programs. Long-established congregations cannot rest in their traditions, but must be committed to venture and enter a search for new resoures (Schaller 1987, 28).

Finally, Schaller notes a rise in what people anticipate from institutions:

> Far more is expected of the public schools, of the federal government, of private business, of the military, of the legal system, as well as the churches, than people expected in the years following the end of World Way II. Excellence, quality, and choice have replaced survival as the key words in the evaluation of the institutions of our society (Schaller 1987, 32).

It is a different world. God's agents are in need of accepting the reality of change and developing effective ways to relate in this different world. There is much work to be done, especially in rural congregations. The integration of urban people into a rural community heightens the need to take a fresh look at the ways God's agents embody the gospel.

The Catalus of the Holy Spirit

The Church, the Body of Christ, is built on a confession--Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:15-19). This confession unites the Christian fellowship. Also strengthening the church are abilities or gifts evident in the fellowship of the believers. These uniting characteristics are not the result of human effort alone. These gifts come to the believer through the providing

design of the Spirit of God. The fellowship of the Body of Christ is developed by a force greater than the combined strength of human unity. This presence of God is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17). Along with encouraging unity, the Holy Spirit is the primary force behind every growth and fruit of salvation, whether through evangelism or the integration of new believers into a fellowship.

A complete theology of the Holy Spirit will not be developed in this paper. This section seeks only to present this writer's belief in the consistant and essential activities of the Holy Spirit. The untiring work of God continues through all believers as inspired and designed by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12: 7-13). Jesus tells his disciples that God will send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to be with them forever. The Holy Spirit "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to:

> Convince the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemmed (John 16:8-11).

Finally, Jesus explained how the Holy Spirit "will guide you into all truth" and will speak not from the Spirit's own knowledge but from what the Spirit hears from God (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is the catalus motivating all believers in their congregational life and their activities in the world.

Everyone is a Theologian

The theology of the writer includes one major premise. Although God took action by entering into human affairs in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God continues to complete the plan of salvation through those people who accept Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. All activities of a believer become a means to invite or nurture others to, likewise, accept Jesus Christ. Every Christian becomes an active agent (bringing an increase or decrease) in communicating and demonstrating the love of God. Since theology is a discipline that attempts to enlighten people about the activities of God, then every committed Christian is a theologian in his/her own right. Life patterns become an attempt to explain how he/she understands the presence of God in his/her sphere of existance. There may be just argument about the premise and quality of a person's living patterns. It may be difficult to find a God-inspired motive behind numerous human actions. Nevertheless, since each Christian becomes one of God's family members or agents, everyone (liking it or not) is a theologian.

Accepting the reality of being a theologian is a vital link in the expansion of the Christian faith. Studies are showing that effective evangelism and integration of new members is taking place less and less through the once prominant evangelistic services. Samuel Southard, from his study of the Southern Baptist denomination, writes that "most of the members spoke of a gradual conversion, while one or two reported a sudden conviction of sin and repentance." He concludes, "the common life of Christians is the cradle of the convert" (Southard 1981, 43). The partners and the follow-up care of those who

shared a faith in Christ are the best methods for integrating new people into the Christian church. Everyone is a vital theologian.

George G. Hunter developes his study of Evangelism through human social networks. He agrees that:

> . . . the Christian faith usually spreads through interpersonal influence (and is usually acquired in 'stages,' spread over weeks or months, or even years) . . . . Faith, is not usually spread by the mass media or by strangers, but by persons who are known and trusted by their hearers (Hunter 1987, 92-93).

According to Hunter, the findings of a Church Growth Study Report indicate that 47 percent of the participants list a person as their influence leading to faith. Of those, 62 percent name a friend or a family member as their bridge to belief in Christ (Hunter 1987, 95).

Each individual Christian is most important in the theological task of introducing other people to faith in Jesus Christ. We are a social people. Evangelism and integration of new persons is best developed by understanding the social networks of living people. When each Christian assumes his/her role as a theologian, the faith finds great opportunity to spread in a "web movement" among the friends and associates of each Christian (Hunter 1987, 93).

One final statement gives shape to the importance of being a theologian. The Gospel moves best through human relationships. "When Christians report the chief characteristic of their human bridge into discipleship, the two most cited adjectives are 'caring' and 'loving'" (Hunter 1987, 102).

Although the spoken word of faith is essential at some points in a relationship, the behaviors and actions of Christians in meeting a person's need, struggle, or point of openness, makes the difference in

advancing the steps of commitment. These relational issues have long been applied to the theories for effective mission, but have not been as readily involved with evangelistic efforts. Current reshaping of evanagelistic patterns shows promise and is encouraged by recent hopeful indicators. "People of God are far more prepared and equipped to evangelize than we have assumed. What is more, effective evangelism is not alien to our people" (Hunter 1987, 106).

Some evangelists today are prepared to suggest new ways of leading people to faith. They take an active role in encouraging Christian people to see their vital part in evangelism. Churches in areas of population growth do best in inviting and integrating new people through the relational bridges or social network. A rural congregation may need to work to expand its relational network when integrating urban background people into their fellowship. The crucial step for each Christian still remains accepting the role of being a theologian.

Behold, An Open Door

Christians live and experience an essential message for the survival of humankind--for both the present life and for eternity. The Christian faith is superior above all other religions in explaining the tragedy, reality, and beauty of human life. Further, it provides divine solutions to human needs with sensual, logical, and intellectual truth. To complete this highest quality senario of Christian faith, let it be noted that no other faith centers on a God-sent person who dies and comes back to life. Jesus Christ returned in a different, yet, a recognizable personage (Luke 24:36-49). The God-sent

person appeared to his followers, not as a ghost, for he had flesh and bones and ate food. The Christian's story about God and Jesus and the continuous presence of Jesus with each believer is beautiful and essential for all people. It brings the promise of repentence and the forgiveness of evil ways with God and other people. Each person can finally be at peace with God, the power within the universe. God's agents should avoid no opportunity to witness to this essential faith (Galations 6:12).

If Christians make such a bold claim, why, after two thousand years, do Christians comprise such a small percentage of the total people? Does this mean that Satan or evil keeps control over some people and parts of the earth? The cross of Jesus Christ brought victory, however, over Satan and death. Why then, are there so few Christians? A more troubling realization comes in asking the same question about the American nation. The principles of America are founded in the Christian faith; yet, according to the United States census, a minority of the people profess a consistent bond with the Christian beliefs. Is this minority condition explained, as Southard comments, a result of "the unfruitful living of those who are supposed to be saved [those who profess belief in Jesus Christ]?" (Southard 1981, 26).

Maybe the Christians do not understand the essential nature of the Christian story and, therefore, keep it to themselves? Or, are the requests of Jesus Christ for total self-sacrifice (Luke 9:23-26) too difficult to follow? All of the above reasons share in the answer. Let the statement be heard--Christians should avoid no opportunity to witness about their faith!

Such a challenge for Christian witness is strengthened by a verse in Revelation, Chapter 3. The writer is giving a message to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut" (Revelation 3:8). Philadelphia of Lydia, Asia, was a town on the merchant trade routes. People from distant countries passed through this town. Philadelphia was a hub of travel and business, consequently, growing in population. New people and travellers from numerous countries were ripe for the witness from the Christian people. The writer of Revelation believes God was opening this door with new people. Christians must not avoid the opportunity to witness amoung the new residents to their community. Since God has opened this door of opportunity, only God, not people, can close it. The very same principle is true in North Branch. An increasing number of people are settling in the surrounding area. God is opening a door of opportunity. Christians of the North Branch United Methodist Church are under God's commission to invite and integrate people joining the growing population in the community!

CHAPTER VI

INSIGHTS FROM SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

From its days of origin in 1855, North Branch village and surrounding area is rural in nature. Agriculture and lumber have been the hub of economic and social life. Although fifty to seventy miles from major urban centers, the North Branch people have chosen to separate themselves from much of the larger world. Their attempt to isolate from the rest of the world continues today; however, the isolation does not hold against the continuous intrusion of new residents and the ripple effects of a changing society. Demographic studies of Lapeer County, including North Branch Township, indicate an average resident increase of 35 percent over the past twenty-five years. The fifty to seventy mile distance from Flint, Pontiac, Detroit, and Port Huron is attracting urban refugees to this area. A sociological understanding of the nature of rural and urban sectors is helpful to this project.

Rural and Urban Differences

The distinctive natures of urban and rural sectors are documented through one hundred years of sociological study. A separate rural society has long existed. In recent years, sociologists have predict-

ed the extinction of "Rural America." In a book entitled Rural U.S.A.: Persistence and Change, the editor, Thomas R. Ford (1978), quotes a statement from Friedman and Miller (1965):

> From a sociological and, indeed, economic standpoint, what is properly urban and properly rural can no longer be distinguished. The United States is becoming a thoroughly urbanized society, perhaps the first such society in history (Ford 1978, 3).

Yet, even the casual observer can detect the difference of contemporary life in New York City from that in North Branch, Michigan, or in Flat Willow, Montana. Although it is difficult to pinpoint where the rural sector begins and the urban ends, what is properly urban and properly rural can still be distinguished. What is even more remarkable is the persistence of the urban-rural differences.

> The graded differences have continued long after the dissipation of social forces that originally were thought to account for them (such as the dissimilar occupation of rural and urban residents), and after the development of new influences (such as rapid transportation and the mass media) (Ford 1978, 3-4).

Studies still uncover a concentration of human characteristics dominant in one sector and minimized in the opposite. Threads of the differences are interpreted from studies of the rural and urban sectors. Harold McSwain (1971), in his Doctor of Philosophy dissertation entitled Rural and Urban Parishes as Social Systems, identifies the most dominant features between rural and urban areas.

> In small communities, face-to-face and intimate primary group contacts prevail, along with an intimate knowledge of persons with whom contact is made . . . . [This succinctly describes a rural community.] In secondary type contacts, on the other hand, although of greater frequency, relationships tend to be of a more segmented nature and with persons of varying origins. [This dominant feature pinpoints the nature of urban sectors] (McSwain 1971, 16).

A study conducted by Edward W. Hassinger, John S. Holik, and J. Kenneth Benson, The Rural Church: Learnings from Three Decades of Change, finds face-to-face group contacts still identify the rural community. They further state that in rural communities the churches remain the hub of primary groups, thriving on tradition and group memory (Hassinger 1988, 158-161).

Harold McSwain brings together conclusions of rural and urban sociologists to highlight differences between rural and urban church communities. Six general hypotheses are noted. First, rural church members are more traditional in beliefs and values than urban church members. Next, rural members create stronger solidarity relationships with religion and the church than urban members. Third, rural church groups are more traditional and less diversified than urban church organizations. Another, finds leaders in rural churches to be more traditionally and less rationally oriented than urban church leaders. In addition, church and religious activities receive more traditional support by rural than urban people. Sixth, there are more limited resources and facilities for rural churches than urban members experience. Rural church members have different demographic and church characteristics than their urban counterparts and are systematically more linked to local church groups than urban church members. Urban church alliances are more closely associated with their denomination and local community groups (McSwain 1971, 63-67).

The earlier mentioned study by Edward Hassinger and associates supports Harold McSwain's general hypotheses. The nature of the rural church has changed very little during their thirty year study.

Rural institutional organizations, on the other hand, "have changed their emphasis from informal relationships to formal relationships" (Hassinger 1988, 24). The rural church has not followed a parallel route. Several reasons explain this phenomenon. Rural churches seem less affected by urbanization (diversified employment, reduction in isolation, and consolidation of services) than do other social institutions. Rural churches tend to focus on the needs of their members, continue what they were in the past, emphasize worship services, remain simply organized, avoid interdependence on denominational centers for program and, "therefore, are not highly sensitive to centralized influences of urbanized society" (Hassinger 1988, 155).

The authors bring this basic conclusion: "As with stability in numbers of congregations [in rural communities], we must be impressed with the stability of the internal organization and programs of rural churches" (Hassinger 1988, 149). This study does not compare cultural characteristics of rural with urban churches. The description, however, of the consistency of the rural church from the past thirty years indicates the rural church, in particular, has not changed its nature to any significant degree. Urban people entering a rural church may be confronted with numerous differences from their familiar norms in church life.

Additional observations help identify characteristics of rural churches. Edward Hassinger reports "those townships that gained population over the entire period [thirty years] were more likely to have a net gain of congregations" (Hassinger 1988, 76). This trend of an increasing number of new churches in rural communities with population

gains may indicate that rural congregations are not receptive to new members. The growing rural society is indexed by a greater occupational variety and a more socio-economically diverse population. A 16 percent gain in non-mainline churches in rural communities from 1952 to 1982 is explained in part by this sociological diversity. Finally, although mainline churches show a 14 percent loss, "the rural church in aggregate is not in jeopardy of demise", except for the open country church (Hassinger 1988, 67-75).

The authors noted a slight shift away from a liberal position to a conservative stance in rural churches. This trend, joining with a tendency for rural churches to care to the needs of current members, suggests "that rural churches may not be effective agents for community integration, but are agents of particularism within the community" (Hassinger 1988, 143-161). These conclusions underscore the importance of this Doctor of Ministry Project. Rural churches must place concerted effort and intentionality in their plans, integrating new and urban people into the life of the rural congregation.

The Rural-Urban Synthesis

Documents continue to show evidence of the persisting differences between rural and urban sectors. A new social entity, however, is developing. As yet, no specialists have appeared, but pastors in particular, are becoming aware of rurban communities. One such pastor, James D. Berkley (1982), writes of his experiences entitled "What I Learned About Rurban Ministry," in the magazine Leadership. James Berkley moved from an associate position with a large metropolitan church to pastor a small church in a rural market town. He writes that

a rurban community lies somewhere on the nebulous rural-urban fringe where population is on the increase. The community has a small town atmosphere in a once rural dominated area with open country nearby and a city offering its advantages within easy traveling distance. The influx of new people keep the town from remaining a quaint little rural village. Yet the town's independence prevents it from qualifying as a suburb. The rurban community maintains its status by the presence of three influencing conditions. Change is inherent and constantly affecting numerous areas of the town's nature. Second, urban refugees continue to migrate to the area, increasing the total population. Finally, rural values remain strong and influence what happens in the life of the community (Berkley 1982, 72-77). North Branch is a rurban community--meeting all the identifying aspects!

James Berkley shares some helpful insights from his pastorate in rurbia. The steady influx of urban newcomers points the community in the direction of constant change. At first, the natives delight in the presence of new people; but as more and more flood the community, they feel besieged by the changes. James Berkley sees the pastor standing in a pressure point. The natives "want their church, at least, to reflect some of the old values which they cherish" (Berkley 1981, 74). Yet changes infiltrate church life. The pastor must be a bridge-builder, interpreter, and peacemaker, bringing the natives and newcomers together as sensitively as possible. The pastor will champion the rights of the natives, while at the same time, work to meet the needs of the newcomers.

This author agrees with James Berkley:

> I know that eventually the natives will lose their church. It will finally become so different from the rural church it once was that the old church will cease to exist. It is inevitable, but it need not be brutal (Berkley 1981, 77).

The pastor receives the unique task of negotiating "the rurban transition for the church and of moving the church forward into its new and expanded role in the community" (Berkley 1981, 77). This means a pastor approaches rurban ministry with a set of assumptions modified from either rural or urban contexts.

Another characteristic of the rurban church is its tendency to be a "time-bomb" waiting for conflict. The "Us versus Them" syndrome is often ready to explode. A rurban pastor is well advised to expose any controversy early and educate quickly both natives and newcomers. It is best to resolve the problems openly before they can fester into a conflict leading to division. The skills needed are similar to those of conflict management. The pastor can be the detergent making oil and water mix, by seeking to understand the feelings and strengths of both groups and translating them between groups.

Rurban towns brim with variety and diversity. Urban refugees come to seek the quality of life they understand to be present in rural America. "More urban than rural, more accustomed to change, more up-rooted from family ties, and more contemporary in outlook, these people present a contrast to the natives. And yet they seek at least some of the same values" (Berkley 1982, 74). The urban newcomers often provide great opportunities in evangelism, but the opportunity with each family is brief. Newcomers settle into new patterns, new routines, and mammothly active schedules in just a few

months. Some are church-goers by nature and others are interested in forming church patterns in their new setting. The church must be prepared to actively court newcomers soon after their arrival. The rurban church can, with planning, grow with the increasing community population (Berkley 1982, 74).

James Berkley finds the rurban congregation may force a pastor to re-think his/her time expectations. The successful rurban pastor will relate easily and personally with people--the natives demand it. Personal contact, genuine friendliness, and time to just chat, become high priorities! One seldom goes downtown on an errand without having a talk with two or three people along the way. Conversations and interruptions enter most scheduled activities. Pastors operating from a typically urban-efficiency or task-oriented model may experience time problems if they are not flexible in their patterns. It is common for a rurban pastor to comment, "My day has no pace" (Berkley 1982, 73-74). It is heartening to this author to learn another rurban pastor has difficulties with time expectations!

Observations of Rural and Urban Differences

Persons of urban background and persons of rural background do not share common expectations, philosophies, or life-style patterns. They view experiences from differing perspectives. These differences must be recognized in any attempts to integrate urban and rural people. In ten years as pastor of North Branch and Clifford, the author notes the following significant differences: Long-time rural people establish lasting relationships. A personal inquiry into a relationship is demonstrating friendliness. On the other hand, an urban

refugee may not wish to increase the number of relationships. A North Branch businessman served a newcomer for several months. The native decided to be friendly by asking the newcomer where he lived. The newcomer became angry and replied, "It's none of your damn business!" Friendliness on the part of one became an invasion of privacy to another. This same difference is reflected in funeral practices. When a rural family experiences death, they commonly ask a neighbor to come to their house to answer the phone and assume kitchen arrangements. This custom is seen as a way of helping and freeing the family during their grief. Urban families may resist such neighborhood practices--grief is a private family matter, usually separated from the larger city commuity. Urban and rural people need to be sensitive to their differing perspectives.

When rural folks stop to visit a neighbor, they generally knock on the door and proceed to walk in. If the neighbor is not home, any package to be delivered is placed on the kitchen or dining room table or in the refrigerator, as appropriate. Urban background people tend to become irritated and angry over such practices. Telephone conversations reveal another difference between rural and urban folk. A rural person may end a lengthy conversation without saying "goodbye". Urban people appear more formal. "Goodbyes" to phone conversations may be expected in the city because there may not be a second conversation with that person. Rural people often part with, "I'll see you later." They likely will see each other later--so why say "goodbye"? These and other differing customs need to be shared for understanding as urban people integrate into a rural congregation.

There are differing habits and expectations in church life between people of rural and urban bakgrounds. Rural folks often address church finances with "Let us know how much is needed and the money will be there." Instead, pledging and financial campaigns are common for urban church members. Spending the church receipts can further create tension. Rural members tend to want the money spent in the local church; urban people can be more world-minded and will support mission projects beyond the local community.

Traditions are also important and become sources of difference. Urban and newcoming people feel excluded in rural church life. They are not familiar, as are the rural natives, with the traditions and stories of the church. Rural church policy is often decided from traditions. Additional tension enters a congregation as newcomers (urban or otherwise) bring ideas with them. A program in a former church is very special to them. The program idea is often met by the long-time members (rural or otherwise) with the response, "Oh, we tried that here years ago and it didn't work." Urban and rural background people can be encouraged to be sensitive and communicative about differences in church life created from earlier experiences.

Both urban and rural people are bidding farewell to former habits and familiar places. New dwellers may be expressing patterns of grief as they settle in the changing community. The rural folk see their community and much of their way of life changing to new and unfamiliar forms. Their community and church life will never return as it was twenty years ago. They are saying goodbye to community and church patterns they knew and loved. Urban newcomers are grieving the loss

of old friends, former churches, and admired communities. They had lived in a center of diverse culture with numerous doors of opportunity; now, they feel unfamiliar with the community's family orientation. Their new community has limited opportunities and appears to "roll up the sidewalk" at 6:00 p.m. Rurban residents must be sensitive to the feelings and experiences affecting both native and incoming people. Working together, they can discover that the rurban community does provide an exhilarating and exciting future for everyone.

Conclusions

Sociology provides insightful explanations about the nature of people. Sociology records the steps involved as cultures respond to changes shaping their present and their future. The author finds added clarity in sociological studies for facing the differences between rural and urban background people. Solutions to all issues involved in inviting and integrating (especially urban refugees) into rural congregations are not found at this time. There is encouragement, however, in finding rurban issues identified by other pastors. Although answers are now being explored, "rurban specialists have not yet appeared. We are on our own in this field" (Berkley 1982, 7). The author of this paper will actively work to develop strengths and creative possibilities for rurban congregations.

CHAPTER VII

A PROJECT IS FORMED

The Early Stages

Involvement in the Doctor of Ministry Program began with a motivation to increase a working knowledge of issues involved as urban and rural people mingle in the same community. At first, no focus for a manageable project was evident. The over-reaching goal for a project was to influence the process of bringing people of two backgrounds into a strong, effective fellowship in the North Branch and Clifford United Methodist Church congregations.

In the first year, involvement in seminary classes of Town and Rural Parishes, Cooperative Parish Ministry and Colloquies on Town and Rural Ministries sharpened issues of American rural life. With these classes completed, I began writing my self-description and church context papers. Identifying major turning points in my life was most rewarding. Strengths were highlighted, improving my developing self-image. Weaknesses were examined with a view to discovering clues for self-improvement. A dominant rural background, coupled with years of living in large cities, provide an excellent cadre of experiences to prepare my involvement in Town and Rural Ministries.

Next came the writing of theology and personal/professional goal papers. Writing theology was a most demanding exercise. Refinements leading to a project focus continued during this time. My faculty advisor and regional seminar participants analyzed, pushed, and struggled with me to guide the development of a sharply focused and manageable project. A point of entry into the integration concern surfaced slowly. Writing skills were also on the agenda for improvement! This was a learning and stretching time, requiring maximum effort and dedication.

During this same time, new adults were becoming active in the North Branch congregation. They were interested in becoming church members. Some of these adults were new to the community; a few had urban backgrounds. In the past, a three-week membership class was adequate as part of church membership preparation. The concept of new and urban people studying together with rural background people began to focus ideas for the project. The three-week instructional classes could be expanded to include issues of urban and rural integration. Membership classes, a point of church entry, are a manageable place to effect integration concerns. The project took shape. Teaching the three-week membership class one last time identified ideas for a new membership program.

The Project in Outline

Adult membership classes in Town and Rural Congregations became the controlling focus of this Doctor of Ministry Program. Six classes for church membership preparation centered on basic United Methodist Beliefs, History, and Purpose. Each class contained material designed

to highlight pertinent issues of involving rural and urban, long-time and new church participants into one congregation. Attempts were made during the weeks of membership classes to stimulate the participation of the larger congregation in the integration process. Six Sunday morning sermons were given to correspond with each membership class. The sermons focused on the congregation's responsibility to welcome new people into its fellowship; the evangelistic potential present in the population growth of the community was equally recognized. A twice-given congregational survey tested progress in integration attitudes of the present membership. The congregation's leadership boards and committees were encouraged to develop programs to support the focus of this project.

Project Associates Make Their Contribution

With the project in focus and outlined, energies next went to forming a support group for the project from people of the Clifford and North Branch congregations. All age categories were represented among school teachers, farmers, auto workers, homemakers, local business people, employed or retired professionals within the eleven Project Associates. One young person, regularly attending church (not an official church member) accepted a Project Associate position. Some were leaders in the church, while a few Project Associates were known to attend only Sunday worship services and church social events. Each one was a person of strong Christian character, exemplifying an open faith in God. Of the eleven, two were of the Clifford congregation. Early in this phase of the project, adult membership preparation proved unrealistic to Clifford's current experience; thus, energies

were focused on the North Branch church and its response to the growing community population.

The Project Associates met ten times in the following year. The first meeting clarified the expectations, duration, and task responsibilities of the Project Associates. The members agreed to examine integration issues and to assist in the development of curriculum and teaching methods for the six Adult Membership Classes. Discussions of each meeting were monitored for later study by a cassette recorder. A letter summarizing the conclusions of the previous meeting was sent to each Project Associate ten days prior to the next session. Each meeting was planned to last for one and one-half hours. Brief evaluation tools of the pastor's leadership were provided relating to the content and presentation in the meeting.

As developer of the total project, I identified numerous Bible passages relating to evangelism and integration themes. Each Project Associate meeting included a brief study of a selected passage. Differences in urban and rural living patterns, expectations, philosophies, and experiences were tested for accuracy. At one point, the Project Associates pretended to be new community residents. From this roleplay, came ideas to better assist people when they come to worship for the first time. Written materials and demographics of the church and community provided information about the growth in population, encouraging the church's response. All meetings were focused on shaping the content and teaching methods for the six Adult Membership Classes. Agreement formed in the Project Associate meetings to include the following six themes for Membership Class sessions:

Spiritual Growth Disciplines, United Methodist Beliefs, Missional and Outreach Philosophies, Denominational and Local Church Histories, Church Structures and Leadership Needs. Characteristics of Rural and Urban Living would be woven into each session. Appropriate handout materials and take-home reading would be included as part of the Membership Class curriculum. All Project Associates agreed the extensive scope of material could only be presented in summary form during a six week period. Although the amount of material available for membership prpeparation classes suggests numerous sessions, a version condensed to six classes seemed a tolerable compromise to interest people with busy lives.

The meetings with the Project Associates were valuable learning sessions. An example comes from my evaluation of the first meeting. My journal reads, "I felt very low after this first P.A. Meeting. It had not flopped, the members were kind and cooperative, but the meeting was not good either." Sometime later, the courage arose to listen to the audio tape of that first meeting. Again, my journal reads, "I noted my muddy presentation style (a tendency to hide nervousness by appearing relaxed and off-handed, numerous 'ah's')." The tape was listened to with great difficulty. Did I sound as bad to others as I did to myself? Quiting was not the answer. I would be assertive and enthusiastic in leading the next class. My journal gives this report:

> What a difference! I felt very elated! High level of participation, excitement and enthusiasm. I did change my presentation style to be directive, enthusiastic, and flexible. Results: We accomplished community building and commitment. I had to shut them down after two and one-half hours!

Other personal learnings about leadership styles resulted from my work with the Project Associates.

Additional values came in the Project Associate sessions. When viewing the community demographic material, members admitted they were aware of the population growth. The church, however, had not yet employed organized ways to influence or include the new community residents in its fellowship. In a similar revelation, people incorrectly estimated the average age of community residents and church members. The Project Associates guessed forty years for the age of community residents and fifty-three years for the members' average age. (The actual figures are 28.9 and forty-one years, respectively.) Along with the above, the Project Associates gave excellent suggestions for a supportive network with membership classes: teams of sponsors for new members after they join, and providing nursery service during the six membership sessions, are examples. Finally, the Project Associates concluded that to interest people in church involvement, a one-to-one faith sharing remains superior among numerous evangelistic and integration ideas.

Inlisting Administrative Board and Council on Ministries Members

During the time of the Project Associate meetings, as pastor, I began explaining the project to an enlargening number of people. Groups and individuals were listening to my short presentations, explaining the reasons and goals of this project. The Council on Ministries (the major church planning group) heard and/or studied numerous mini-explanations, including the community and church age-sex pyraminds (Table 5, p. 27). All attempts to gain support were low key, yet people were listening. In April of 1986, the Council on Ministries began a lengthy, goal-setting process. As pastor, I provided

background guidance, while leaving the leadership with the Council Chairperson. Following months of deliberate purpose and goal development, the Council established eleven goals from four areas of concern The guiding concerns were: Caring for the Church Family, Putting God and Church First, Reaching and Keeping Newcomers, and Music Needs. The amount of energy and level of ownership given to the goal-setting process was impressive. It is also encouraging to find Project Concerns surfacing as next year's church goals (Appendix A).

Interludes and Final Details

Was the emphasis of inviting new people to our congregation having an affect? No clear tie with the project discussions could be established; however, twelve adults, new to the congregation, were asking to become church members. The materials for the six Membership Classes were prepared. The Project Design had not been completed for submission and necessary acceptance by the United Seminary commission. In spite of this one incompleted task of the doctoral program, the adults were ready for membership classes, so the sessions were organized, using the material for six classes as compiled in the Project Associate meetings. Class evaluations were included. A strong group spirit developed among the members of these first membership classes. As the classes ended, some members expressed a willingness to continue study groups following their membership vows. The six-class membership model and materials showed great promise.

These Adult Membership Classes ending in March 1988 could appear to be an unfortunate example of bad timing--the classes were designed to be my project for the Doctor of Ministry Program. Twelve adults is

a numerically large and diverse group, just right for group dynamics and feedback necessary for such a project. Was this great opportunity wasted because all components were not ready? This first round of classes became a springboard from which the best conditions for learning developed. The sermons were prepared and delivered. The Congregation Questionnaire (to test the attitudes of the congregation toward integrating new people) was prepared and answered during a Sunday morning worship (Appendix B). Although none of the participants in the Adult Membership Classes were urban in background, the sessions included materials describing both rural and urban concerns. It was reassuring to discover that most persons sensed the rural/urban differences. Modules about blending urban and rural background people should be included in future classes, even if no urban background people are present. Finally to note, the congregation also began a program to provide sponsors for new members with the participants of this first membership module (Appendix C). All segments of this "dry run" were beneficial in every respect!

The success of the Adult Membership Classes was followed by another formative experience for the congregation. One of the professional goals in the Project Design was to experience a "Skills for Caring Workshop". Twelve leaders from North Branch gathered at the church for three days in April 1988 to participate in this learning experience, led by Detroit Conference program leaders. The workshop was a most intense experience. Participants used workbooks and group involvement to develop a theology of caring, to explore the sociological and psychological theories, and to practice acts of caring. The

North Branch participants understood and accepted all the steps of this workshop. The experience brought two important conclusions.

First, people of the congregation are genuinely caring. Our method of expressing care is, however, very quiet. In a rural community there is an unwritten promise, "If you need something, I'll be there!" When trouble or need strikes a family, the rural community quickly rallies to the cause. "Thank you's" may be heard, but physical demonstrations are kept to a minimum. New people, however, do not know the community traditions and caring networks; this rural congregation can increase its outreach effectiveness by adopting plans and steps to demonstrate a caring nature to new community residents.

Second, the workshop clarified an important awareness of the nature of the congregation. By tradition, North Branch United Methodist people do not have a consistent practice of visiting residents on behalf of the church. In past years, the rural community always knew each neighbor's family ties, each neighbor's place in the community, each one's interest in religious or church ties. Such matters were settled (the family was forever Catholic or Lutheran or Methodist) and people were left on their own. Today, the habits of new community residents are not automatically evident. People of this rural congregation need to learn and feel confident in the practice of visiting new people, sharing faith, and inviting people to join them in building faith relationships. The twelve North Branch workshop participants agreed to take part in a few new caring activities within the congregation and, in later months, develop programs to reach community residents. This workshop provided background learning for inviting and integrating new people into the church fellowship.

Two important steps of the Doctor of Ministry Program next took final development. The Project Design was completed and given acceptance by the Doctor of Ministry Commission in October of 1988. The Project, "Adult Membership Classes in Town and Rural Congregations," was clear for "take-off." At the same time, ten adults were newly active in the congregation and asking to become members. The classes were scheduled for November, ending in December. All was in place for implementation of the project.

The second component developed while the Project Design was being completed. The Consulting Faculty members were engaged for further development of the Adult Membership Class contents. Bill Verhelst, of Grand Blanc, Michigan, provided ideas for evaluation tools and guidance in understanding rural church life. Bill is a staff member of the Detroit Conference, United Methodist Church, and responsible for the Parish Development in Urban and Rural Churches. He sees one consistent difference between urban and rural congregations. Rural churches plan around relational or family themes. Urban churches are basically programatic in design. The strengths of the two congregational natures can be united, especially in churches in rurban communities.

Faculty Advisor, Father Jude Ellinghausen, is the priest of the Clifford and North Branch Roman Catholic churches. Father Jude's knowledge of the two communities is similar to the author's. He provided information and resources concerning Roman Catholic programs for incorporating newly converted adults into parish life. This information will be shared in more detail in Chapter IX.

The third Faculty Advisor is Sue Shoemaker, a teacher and junior high school counselor in the North Branch Consolidated School District. Sue assisted by refining the Adult Membership Class materials, suggesting techniques for classroom teaching, and providing evaluation of teaching skills. Sue carefully examined all materials suggested for each of the six classes as presented in the March sessions. The content and plan of the class materials was agreed to be well designed. The amount of material included in each session was a concern. The author was encouraged to focus on four or five major points for each class. The voluminous class material suggested for each presentation would exceed overload for most students--whittling and streamlining the class content became a most rewarding, learning responsibility.

Sue Shoemaker provided theory to clarify the optimum ways people retain information. Some individuals learn best from visual presentations. They need to see information demonstrated. Others learn best through auditory channels. Attending a lecture works well for them. A third learning channel is the tactical, the "hands-on" method. Finally, other learners have the ability of total concentration and will retain information from a combination of all of these methods. The objective in teaching a class is to vary among all methods, as appropriate with the material. Sue very willingly spent two evenings observing the author in the adult membership classroom. The author's teaching skills were highly affirmed, adding strength to an improving self-image.

The Project in Action

The Project, "Adult Membership Classes in Town and Rural Congregations" officially met each Sunday evening from October 30 to December 11, 1988. Twelve adults attended, ten became church members, one chose to delay membership, and one was a long-time active church member -- a goal and dream of this project. The title of the class sessions, therefore, became, "Adult Membership and Reaffirmation Classes." This author plans to request the participation of long-time members in future membership classes. The contribution of the long-time member brought a valuable exchange around local traditions, feelings, and expectations concerning church membership. A certificate of participation and appreciation was conferred to the long-time member during the worship service when the new adults were received as church members.

The first meeting of the Adult Membership and Reaffirmation Class was a social time, designed to introduce the participants to each other, thus increasing the number of membership classes specified by the project to seven; however, devoting one class session to introductions proved most valuable, since the class members seldom know each other. One helpful introduction tool is to ask each person or couple to give directions for travel from the church to their home. Class expectations, scope of the study material, and participants' questions completed the agenda of the first meeting. Scripture was used for worship and study in each class. A syllabus was provided for each of the seven classes (Appendix D).

The second session focused on the nature of the church and the essence of Christian faith (prevenient, justifying, sanctifying grace). A brief evaluation form attempted to find the level at which class members understood the presented material, provided a scale to assess the leader's style and presentation, and requested recommendations to improve teaching and class planning (Appendix E).

The third class described the essence of the Christian faith through the Doctrine of the Trinity, highlighting United Methodist foundations and guidelines for making Christian decisions.

The fourth class focused on unique aspects of United Methodists and a brief history of the United Methodist Denomination. Maximum effort was given during each class to involve all members and to encourage reflection on their personal faith journey. A variety of written handouts and take-home papers were provided.

The attention of the fifth class was centered on personal salvation through acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Participants were encouraged to recall their first memory or introduction to Jesus. The concluding part of the class highlighted the choice of disciplines that strengthen and grow a personal faith commitment. Helps for studying the Bible were presented. A brief class evaluation concluded the session (Appendix F).

The sixth class was a study of the structure of the United Methodist Denomination and the North Branch congregation. A panel of leaders assisted in this class and gave a brief description of their responsibilities. The study included an exercise in group building and congregational cooperation.

The seventh class began with a tour of all church buildings, except the parsonage. Strengths of the congregation were discussed. Personal commitment to Jesus Christ and the local congregation was encouraged. Details about the Sunday Morning Membership vows and reception service was reviewed. The session concluded around the chancel altar sharing a brief service of Holy Communion.

The congregation was involved in the membership process during the weeks of class meetings. The liturgy and sermon of each Sunday Morning worship service corresponded to the evening study. The first Sunday emphasized the theme of integrating new people into the fellowship, the reality of urban and rural background people mingling together in this community, and a presentation of the purpose of the church. The second week featured one or two of the Basic Beliefs of the United Methodist Church. The third Sunday focused on the History of the Denomination and the local church, looking back to see what God has done. With such faith assurance highlighted, a Christian finds reason to follow God into the future. The fourth worship service presented the story of salvation given by the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. The concluding emphasis was a challenge to be involved in missional outreach. The fifth Sunday presented the various United Methodist personal and public disciplines to strengthen and deepen the Christian's Walk With God. The final Sunday featured a Re-affirmation of Church Membership Vows with a challenge to accept the open opportunity God is offering to North Branch through the growing population surrounding the congregation. Scripture texts began each sermon theme and were chosen from a varying supply of Biblical passages.

Bulletin inserts were also provided to support each Sunday's theme. The Congregational Questionnaire of Appendix B was given first on February 14, 1988 and repeated November 13, 1988. Results were shared with the Sunday worship congregation the following week.

Spinoffs and Ownership Development

It may be true--there's nothing like a good project to stimulate people into action. The congregation consistently expressed their support for the pastor's involvement in the Doctor of Ministry Program. They further made plans themselves and initiated programs to support the project. The pastor's motivation and direct leadership was not involved. The leaders increased their level of responsibility, taking ownership in guiding the future of the congregation. This pastor happily lists some of the symptoms pointing to this rising self-determination of the congregation.

The Council on Ministries, on their own initiative, engageed in a goal-setting program, as earlier mentioned. The resultant goals were future-oriented and showed an interest in caring for new church members. One goal, a multi-purpose classroom and gym, as a building addition to the church, suggests the congregation's openness to being ready and attentive to the interests of future families and new residents. The Sponsor Program, created to introduce and support new adult members as they integrate into the congregation, demonstrated interest and care for new people. Each new member received a pew Bible, a one-year subscription to the Michigan Christian Advocate, and a booklet entitled This We Believe. This gift program was well organized and implemented by church leaders, not the pastor. The Council

on Ministry members, on their own initiative, provided babysitting for the children of parents involved in the membership classes.

Another spinoff activity from the Project is the creation of a brochure given to people attending worship for the first time. This brochure is complete with pictures, information, and maps to familiarize new people with the church and the life of the congregation.

Caring Programs have been developed in response to the Skills in Caring Workshop. A new page is now included in the monthly newsletter, giving birthdays, anniversaries, and recognition of significant church family events. Prayer requests during each Sunday worship have increased to include community people. The church sanctuary is designed with two entrance and exit doors. Greeters are now arranged to be at the exit door not occupied by the pastor after the service.

New adult study classes were formed three months following the Membership Project. The organization, purpose, and structure of these classes was completed by church leaders, inviting the pastor to participate. It is the observation of this pastor that the new members from the Project Class of November and its March predecessor are more involved in the activities of the congregation than was true from previous classes. Some new members are teaching children's Sunday School classes; others are giving leadership to church activities. This increased involvement must, in part, be attributed to the congregation's increased interest toward new members. The church members are assuming responsibility in the development of their congregational fellowship.

This paper presents one further example to demonstrate the congregation's growing determination to assume ownership in planning

their future. In January 1988, the Detroit Conference announced plans to organize a trip to the country of Israel for Michigan United Methodists. The pastor made no comments about this trip. A few weeks after the Conference announcement, the congregation determined to cover all expenses to Israel for the pastor and spouse. They wanted to show appreciation for the work and ministry of Roger and Donna. The trip was solely the idea of the congregation. This demonstrates their increasing interest in making decisions as a congregation. The years of this Continuing Education Project are synonymous with the growing congregational momentum to be responsible in shaping their future.

CHAPTER VIII

RESULTS AND EVALUATIONS

The author is delighted to give a positive report of this project. The Adult Membership Classes were a success for the programs of the congregation and for the learning of the pastor. Although the project did not achieve a total integration of new and urban people into a Town and Rural Congregation, this goal, admittedly, cannot be reached in a one-step method. However, the project does provide understanding of the nature of urban and rural integration. The Adult Membership Classes can be one important link -- moving the new people and the congregation forward in the journey toward complete integration.

The spinoffs developed by the Council on Ministries, the Administrative Board, and the congregational life are reported in Chapter VII. This chapter will touch on further results of the "ah-awhs", as hinted or verified from the surveys and evaluations. The major portion of this chapter will discuss the author's learnings in implementing and carrying out this project. The pastor developed his leadership skills and was strengthened through numerous understandings of personal characteristics.

Steps in a Positive Direction

The first positive result in the congregation was the development of new activities. A program was created to intentionally show care toward the new adult church members. Sponsoring members were sought for each joining adult, a first for this congregation! The program was well organized, with written objectives and a training session for the sponsors. Sponsors were acquired with ease. The Council on Ministries further provided meaningful gifts for the joining adults: a pew Bible, a copy of This We Believe, and a one-year subscription to the Michigan Christian Advocate. Other new activities relating to this project include the Council on Ministries' futuristic goals and the numerous programs to increase the caring ministries within the congregation.

A second result from the project was the increased awareness in the congregation of the presence of new and unfamiliar settlers in the community. Presenting demographics of the community population and the North Branch church reinforced the suspicion that the community is growing. Members worked to increase their contacts with new people. The congregational questionnaire showed improvement in contacts. The number of church members who, "when a neighbor is ill, take soup, a meal, or make a visit" rose from eight to fourteen percent; the "sometimes visit" category dropped from fifty-nine to fifty percent. The response concerning Sunday morning contacts with new attenders changed from four to eleven percent in the "always" response and dropped from twenty-seven to twenty-one percent in the "seldom" category. People are frequently lining up to greet new worship attenders.

Another sign of the increasing awareness to care for others is the current plan to hire a Youth Director. Necessary funds were pledged for employing a full-time Youth Director by September 1, 1989. The North Branch congregation sees the need to provide intensified youth programs for their own youth and for the increasing number of youth in this community.

During the ten years of this pastorate, long-time church members have indicated interest in attending Adult Membership Classes. They have quickly and enthusiastically been invited -- but have not attended. This project broke that cycle! One long-time member attended all but one of the seven classes. Each session was significantly strengthened as the long-time member shared traditions or faith stories of involvement in this congregation. The member summerized the experience, "I enjoyed meeting the new people and I think I'm closer to them through sharing the class." Integrative efforts are strengthened by the active presence of an open, receptive long-time member in the classes. This pastor will employ all possible efforts to involve long-time members in each Adult Membership and Re-Affirmation Class series. Such participation by church members is a key factor in integrating new members.

The project identified the North Branch people as being open to new persons, while remaining very rural in attitudes. The congregational response about inviting a neighbor or friend to a church event rose from thirty-five to thirty-nine percent. A response showing the felt care of the congregation increased from eighty to eighty-eight percent between March and November. Warmth and friendship extended to

first-time attenders was experienced by eighty-five percent of the people answering the survey. The congregation is improving its openness to new people!

The results of the project's Congregational Questionnaire confirms the rural nature of the North Branch Church people. Opinions regarding "big city" and/or "small town/rural" characteristics (Questions 22-36), were predominantly answered in the pro-rural or no difference category. When compared with national results to the same questions, North Branch answers scored higher in the rural emphasis. The church members are remarkably rural in their assessment of the best geographic location for happy and healthy living!

Observations of the Project

Observation #1: Classes Are a Place to Begin

The controlling motive for the project was to initiate at least one program to encourage the integration of urban and rural background people. Adult Membership and Re-Affirmation Classes definitely provide opportunities to stimulate integration issues, especially if long-time members attend. Each class is designed to highlight a minimum of one issue or philosophy to clarify differences between urban and rural perspectives. Some class discussions lead into urban and rural topics. The church membership roster demonstrates the family nature of rural congregations and provides opportunity to cite families whose ancestors are charter members. A class on church finances invites the comparison of low-key rural money raising practices with a more structured (possibly urban) approach of pledges and financial campaigns. Class material can encourage discussion of uniqueness of

rural customs. Rurban people can, for instance, be prepared to find packages delivered on their dining room table when they are not at home. Phone conversations may end without a formal "goodbye". Class participants may also offer additional differences between the customs of urban and rural families.

There were few former urban people in the membership class at the time of the project. The urban/rural comparison material seemed out of place and was limited to only a few issues. In looking back, the author realizes it was a mistake to limit comparison material. A significant key of the integration process is to suggest to rural or urban people the differing perspectives of their community or church neighbor. Urban and rural perspectives will be presented in each of the future Adult Membership and Re-Affirmation Classes.

Membership classes are an important link in the integration of new and long-time members; however, the influence from these classes will be limited. A total all-congregational-effort must be employed for integration to be successful. Sponsoring members, sermons giving theological motive for inclusion, caring ministry emphasis, people of the congregation (not only sponsors) inviting the new members into participation, and long-time members attending membership classes are some suggestions to enhance a total integration program. Group discussions and newsletter articles can tastefully encourage understanding between urban and rural, new and long-time church participants. The greater the amount of special attention given to new members, the more rapid their inclusion in the congregation. In like manner, the greater the distance of philosophies and perspectives between people,

the longer the time required to achieve the goal of integrating such persons into one congregation. Complete integration is not easily achieved.

In his book, Reflections of a Contrarian, Lyle Schaller brings insights to the problem of congregational integration. His first chapter stressed the difficulties involved in building and maintaining a high degree of diversity within congregations. A church located in a rurban community is in danger of experiencing a high level of diversity. The pressures to change will heighten the struggles within the congregation. Lyle Schaller believes a highly diversified congregation can be successful in its ministries if it employs the majority of ten listed factors. The fourth factor relates to this Adult Membership project. "New member orientation classes run for at least thirty-two weeks before prospective new members are invited to join" (Schaller, 1989, 22). A six week class appears to fall short in attempts to overcome the struggles inherent in diversity and in the process of integration. Schaller's suggestion for thirty-two classes (three years), however, pushes beyond realistic endurance for both potential members and congregational resources.

Observation #2: Classes Are a Tip of the Iceberg

Adult Membership Classes are a link in the integration of urban and rural people -- but they only assist -- not provide the solution. As evidenced in the project, there is little control of the urban/rural mixture in the class. The influence for integration diminishes as the class members comprise all urban or all rural backgrounds. Secondly, the real test of inclusion is with the leadership positions.

The higher the percentage of recent church members elected as decision leaders, the higher the inclusion of new people into the congregation.

Other factors may explain why there is a high number of rural people among the new church members. The homogeneous principle may account for the lack of urban members. This principle "suggests that numerically growing churches are most likely to be reaching, attracting, serving, and assimilating new members who bear a remarkable resemblance to the people who already are members" (Schaller, 1989, 15). A study of the North Branch people reveals new adult members of the past ten years are either rural in back-ground, long-time-activated community residents, or members of long-established community families. "Birds of a feather" appear to be flocking together.

Another influence to consider in attracting resident members is the emerging "Baby Boom Generation". These are people born in America between 1946 and 1964. Enrollment in the North Branch School District continues to climb. The parents of these school children will come from this unique generation. Baby Boomers have specific expectations and are, thereby, attracted or discouraged in attendance by local churches. Does North Branch need to examine more closely the attracting/entrance opportunities for the congregation? Also to include in such studies, is an examination of the differences involved between the five generations attending church today. Lyle Schaller provides an excellent foundation for a study of generations (Schaller, 1989, 67-94).

Observation #3: The Importance of Sunday Morning Involvement

This project awakened the author to the importance of bringing

adult membership training into the weekly worship experience. Sermons, bulletin inserts, and liturgies for the six classes focus attention on the significance and commitment of church membership. Subjects abound on each of the six class topics to vary the worship focus when membership classes are next scheduled. The long-time members review and update their understanding of member commitment. The congregation is involved with membership training; people give closer attention to the persons seeking membership. Everyone is better prepared to participate meaningfully as the new adults become official members on the designated Sunday.

The survey further indicates the significance of Sunday morning involvement. Exposing people to the questions included in the survey is good--interpreting the answers, however, is more difficult. Sunday morning is not a controlled group. Barely one-third of the morning worshippers attend each week. Determining any change in congregational attitudes is difficult. One-half to two-thirds of the second survey morning worshippers were not present to answer the first time. A different method is needed to test the change of attitudes toward new and urban people. This survey will not be used in future membership training programs.

The survey did, however, clarify the congregation's consistent preference to choose small town or rural locations to satisfy lifelong goals. The second survey showed an increase from the previous pole in preferring a rural or small town bias. When compared to a national survey of the same questions, this congregation's response was dangerously rural. Urban people may sense a greater rejection of

city values than they wish to accept. They may tend to feel isolated and misunderstood in their attempts to settle in their new surroundings. The North Branch Congregation needs to feel good about rural values while, at the same time, broadening their knowledge and appreciation for qualities found in urban living. The excess rural bias may be silently maintaining a cool reception to urban people and encouraging new worship attenders to continue shopping for a new church.

Observation #4: Where Are the Urban Refugees?

The adult membership classes left both a surprise and a disappointment. The number of former urban people seeking membership were few. Out of twenty-one adults joining in 1988, only three are from a large city. The remaining class members were long-time-family people who had recently moved back to North Branch, or who had lived all their lives in this community and had just decided on a church commitment. This is not a complaint against the people who are joining. It is, however, important to know this fact--understand it--and recognize the need to broaden church recruiting methods to entice urban members. The small number of urban people joining the church may be explained by one of the following reasons:

1) New residents moving to North Branch are, by majority, from another town or rural community--not from a city; or
2) new residents are not by nature United Methodist members; or
3) new residents experience a cool reception from the congregation; or
4) new residents are not choosing ANY church affiliation (a recent study revealed that only twenty-three percent of Lapeer

County residents claim a church relationship); or

5) they are sensing a generation gap with current members; or

6) new residents are avoiding the United Methodist Church because it fails to relate adequately to their needs.

Further research will reveal whether "any", "some", "which ones?" or "all-of-the-above" are relevant as reasons why so few urban background people are seeking membership in the North Branch United Methodist Church.

Observation #5: New Members Need Introductions

One final observation from the project may seem trite, but should not be overlooked. Class members usually do not know each other's first or last names. They do not know where each other lives. Extensive introductions are essential in the first session with weekly name tags and mini "get aquainted" activities in each class. A strong group appreciation and trust develops among the members by their growing familarity with each other. Such group spirit could encourage the continuation of study classes after membership Sunday.

Learnings From Class Evaluations

The first learning from class evaluations relates to the leader's personal sharing and participation. Evaluation forms were filled out in the third and fifth sessions. The majority of the evaluations gave high marks to the personal sharing and participation by the leader. Answers further complimented the amount of preparation given for all aspects of the classes. The discussions, while presenting the material, were listed as strong features of the class. Six questionnaires indicated no weak features to the class.

A second learning from evaluations centers on the amount of presented classroom material. Most class members remembered the first and second purposes given for worship, but rated the third given purpose as last in order. Too much information and too many theories about worship were presented, bringing about this confusion. The evaluation answers about sanctification, justification, and prevenient grace indicated that the material was not presented with enough clarity to be understood. This weakness also surfaced from participants wishing for more information about grace and salvation. The class was too high on content, lacking development when dealing with specific topics, and needing improved clarity of material presented. The class members expressed a weakness around the amount of their participation.

Evaluations from the sixth session indicated that the leader made significant improvement in class presentation. The class participants understood the materials focusing on Bible study and the development of a personal relationship with God and Christian people. Class participants rated their resolve to continue developing these Christian disciplines well above average (4.5 with 6 as complete resolve). Blank spaces or "none" represented responses to the question of "weaker features". Six of nine respondents gave highest marks for participation and personal sharing of the leader. Responses to the question of the stronger features of the class were affirmative and specific. Three answers listed the increased willingness of class participation and the growing fellowship among class members. There were no questions relating to class content, leaving the impression that materials were presented with improved clarity. One person ap-

preciated receiving handouts one week prior to the session (to allow for better preparation/discussion). "Refreshing" and "strengthening" were listed adjectives to describe their evening.

A third learning from evaluations relates to teaching skills. I felt affirmed and encouraged to improve specific teaching skills for classroom sessions. For instance, giving study materials before the class session helps people feel prepared and increases their participation in class discussions; whereas, take-home papers about studies already presented in the session are most likely laid aside. Future sessions of Adult Membership and Re-Affirmation classes will be planned with at least one take-home paper providing a basis for discussion in the coming class. The written comments further indicated the participants' wish for a more detailed explanation of specific beliefs. The next membership classes will touch on United Methodist beliefs and focus on selected beliefs. A comparison of the third and fifth evaluation answers indicated improvement for both leader and class participants.

Finally, one teaching characteristic is highlighted by all evaluations: As a teacher, this writer tends to provide too much material for each class! This happens in two ways: first, by offering more topics than can be absorbed in one learning session; and second, by providing explanations on a given topic with a quantity of detail, thus bringing confusion, not clarity. This teacher will concentrate on giving a brief summary of the subject first, then provide additional information, concluding with a summary of the main point. People seem to remember the topic best when its summary comes first. Prepa-

rations for future Adult Membership Classes (and other study groups) will concentrate on refining material and choosing to present only four or five topics per session.

Class Evaluation of Pastor's Leadership

Persons attending the Adult Membership and Re-Affirmation classes received an evaluation form one month following the conclusion of the sessions. The form and tabulations are included in Appendix G. The questions focus on leadership qualities, teaching skills, and levels of personal growth. The answers highly affirm leadership qualities and, to a lesser degree, affirm teaching skills and observed personal growth. Three areas are noted for improvement. The material and discussions concerning urban and rural differences were good, but too infrequent. Additional examples of differences will be prepared to strengthen this manner of assisting the integration of urban and rural background people. A second item for improvement is selecting United Methodist beliefs for detailed study, noting the need to focus the presentation, especially in the area of theology. A third area for improvement includes the presentation of the local church structure by the leaders. Involving the church leaders in the class is good; however, the method of presenting church structure, job descriptions, and the design of the leadership panel will be refined before the next series of membership classes.

Class participants' answers to what the classes meant to them produced affirmative and helpful responses for the teacher. The participants learned about United Methodist doctrines and beliefs, stirring in them a hunger to identify specific differences in beliefs

between Lutherans, Baptists, Roman Catholics, and United Methodists. One class member noted growth in spiritual and local church commitment in his/her Christian journey. Other members appreciated learning about the United Methodist Church and how their church works. The class sessions helped them feel more at home in the church and among the members in North Branch. Written comments included experiencing spiritual enrichment and good fellowship. Class members frequently stayed to chat with each other as their children continued to play together in the nursery. The teacher's self-image was strengthened by these written comments about the value of the classes: ". . . getting to know the pastor as a very knowledgeable, 'down-to-earth' sort of minister", and "a very caring, decent person." The long-time church member stated the classes helped her "feel closer to the new adult members."

Evaluations From a Classroom Observer

The primary focus of a Doctor of Ministry Project is to understand and improve the leadership skills of the candidate. This learning comes from designing and leading the project and from involvement in evaluations. Learnings from this project, Adult Membership and Re-Affirmation Classes, were significantly enhanced through the expert guidance of Sue Shoemaker. Classroom content and teaching methods were reviewed. Sue further attended the fourth and sixth membership classes. A written report of her combined observations is presented in its entirety in Appendix H.

Frequently not noticed by an observer, the writer of this document was very nervous with Sue Shoemaker present in the class. Teach-

ing skills have never before been evaluated by one who knows--doubts of my ability have seldom been relieved. Classroom weaknesses and (hopefully) teaching strengths were exposed! This writer's self-esteem was significantly strengthened by Sue's assessment of the myriad of leadership and teaching skills displayed during the two membership classes. Although improvement is needed, the important learning from Sue's evaluation gives this writer courage to enter teaching situations with renewed confidence. Energy invested to develop teaching skills will be productive, for these will build on identified abilities to organize lessons, to set a smooth pace, and to design interesting class content.

The second focus of Sue Shoemaker's observations centered on leadership qualities. This writer is viewed to be very people-oriented, expressing sincere concern for classroom participants, evidenced by the careful preparation and planning for each class. Other noted leadership skills included sensing when to talk and how to listen. As a teacher, this writer maintained a gentle yet firm control of discussions. In Sue's judgement, the pastor/teacher was facilitating an opportunity that could lead to developing unity, cooperation, and understanding between long-time church participants and new adult members.

Sadly, but truthfully, this writer's built-in low self-esteem had not been balanced over the years by recognizing the positive leadership abilities also developed in my person. Instead, my focus had normally centered on weaknesses or negative characteristics. The evaluation, written observations, and the work of completing this entire project has raised numerous reasons to build a humble confidence in my abilities as pastor, teacher, and leader.

A Pastor Learns and Grows

Entrance into a Doctor of Ministry Program happened over numerous years. My dissatisfaction with short-term seminars and workshops is already noted. Commitment to Town and Rural Ministry sets my context. The suggestion of a Doctor of Ministry study came eight years ago through a friend. He was planning to enroll in a program and needed to form a study group. As usual, my response was to "think" on it. During my two-year thinking, my friend began his program. My delay was not from lack of interest. I would occasionally talk with other pastors about similar study programs. Money is always a consideration, but seldom THE problem. As demonstration of my sincere interest, a few months after learning of my friend's decision I drove to Dayton to inquire about the Doctor of Ministry Program with the United Theological Seminary. An application was completed following my visit.

The answer to my habit of delay came in writing my Self-Description paper. Hesitation is a pattern developed from a series of experiences. My basic reasons for holding back are twofold: The acceptance of an "average" view for performance and my reluctance to engage in a task of significant difficulty. I was never confident of having the abilities needed to begin or accomplish a project of the magnitude involved in a Doctor of Ministry program. My tendency to avoid difficult tasks began with childhood struggles around health problems. From genetic traits, my body has no sweat glands. This condition is known as anhidrosis, or hypohydrotic ectodermal dysplasia (HED). All body surfaces (including the mouth and throat) produce a low level of fluids. Germs and pollen easily lodge in the throat and tonsil area.

Colds, flu, or pneumonia controlled fifty percent of my childhood years. I learned not to count on participating in future events. The anhidrosis condition further prevents my involvement in most activities where body sweating is a result. My choice of activities was constantly restricted and I was encouraged to limit my effort in any event. Good at the game of hockey, for example, I could not push to excel; average play had to be adequate. In addition, outside temperatures in excess of seventy-five degrees forced me to sit on the sidelines and observe other people working and playing. The accummulation of these experiences trained me to only observe most activities, to accept an average performance when involved, or to control involvement in challenging opportunities.

The writing of my Self-Description paper brought the above issues together. I understood how easy it is to excuse giving a superficial amount of participation for an activity, accepting average performance from my efforts, or avoiding a demanding opportunity. It explains why I hesitated when facing the challenge of a Doctor of Ministry program. Did I have the abilities, the stamina, the dedication to complete the requirements? The four years taken to write the Project Design is, explained in part by the tendency to question my personal abilities. When the Seminary Commission accepted my Project Design, my self-evaluation began to change! A demanding opportunity could be accomplished with hard work and determination. Not ready to take on the world, I will at least be willing to risk putting effort into future projects. My childhood experiences, previously unexamined, have undersold my belief in personal abilities!

The first learning about the value of investing my energies came with the passing of the Project Design; I somehow expected to be asked to submit rewrites or be told my work was "not up to standard". The approval of my project was a transforming experience, leading me to accept more willingly the challenges God sets before me. The ability to learn, adapt, and engineer involved projects may not be beyond my reach. The needed ingredient is my total effort to employ developed skills and accept, with faith, the opportunities in the days ahead.

A second door for personal growth came through a series of enlightenments concering my self-image. The experiences of early life develop a self-view and the resulting image is implanted in one's subconscious. A person may relate with people using an apparently healthy and capable self-image, without understanding that deep within they operate with a low self-esteem. This condition is hidden, even from the person, and avoided at all costs. The defense mechanisms prevent a critical view of oneself, except for periodic glimpses brought about by unexpected encounters.

Physical problems tied with a unique physical appearance drained my ability to feel good about myself. Being small, I was often overpowered by my "friends" and forced to disgusting acts, like kissing girls. I had to avoid summer fun or sport activities, inspite of my intense desire to participate. These experiences of early childhood and young adult years taught me to feel frustrated and disadvantaged, often disgusted with myself. This low self-image was glimpsed while reading Psalm 139. The verses resonate with my view that God is familiar with all my ways. In fact, I feel "hemmed in" (verse 5) with

less than positive expressions, unable to flee from the way God made me. My inner feelings surfaced when reading verse 13, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." My response came, "Yes, and in making me, something went wrong." I could not say with the Psalmist in verse 14, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." I have seldom felt "fearfully and wonderfully made". Instead, a degree of disappointment, and even a wish to protest, is my reaction to how I have been created. My physical appearance and limited ability to participate created a personal view that affected all areas of my life. Buried within, this low self-image has become a learned response to most opportunities.

The same lesson came crashing into my self-awareness a few months later. Our family was spending an evening at a shopping mall. Our daughter, Nicole, without intentionally looking for new clothes, noticed a blouse and stylish jeans outfit that truly looked sharp. She did not need these new clothes, but they looked cute. Nicole humbly commented, "I'm worth it." Her remark set me reflecting on how I apply similar situations to my self-evaluation. Looking back, I identify very few moments when I felt of significant value to justify spending money on unnecessary clothes. Instead, feeling of little worth, my accepted pattern is to make do with just enough clothes, all of which are by style normal and blah. That's about all I'm worth or deserve. Taking this view further, why bother trying a significant project, pouring myself into developing my skills. Make do with what you have. This low self-view has prevented a balanced appreciation or exploration of my skills. Unable to overcome limitations in my physi-

cal body, I tricked my psychie into accepting myself just as I was without working hard to develop God's gifts to their highest potential.

A very important third learning from the project came in professional skills. Studies in college or seminary never included methods in creating lesson plans for classroom teaching. Yet, teaching is claimed to be a number two, three, or four priority in a pastor's given responsibilities. My experience confirms the importance of a teaching role: responsible for Junior and Senior High Youth Fellowships, Adult Bible Studies, Confirmation Classes, Adult Membership Classes, children's classes, youth groups, and leadership training. Although sensing a moderate success in a teaching role, I have always proceeded with reservation. Never trained as a teacher, a low self-confidence dominated most classroom settings.

The project taught me to approach a classroom with confidence and gave me courage to improve skills already evident in my teaching style. A qualified and esteemed teacher observed two membership classes and critiqued my curriculum for all seven class sessions. Strong teaching abilities were identified. The evaluations by class participants also encouraged me to trust my teaching skills. I do well when taking a concept, expanding it for teaching, using most often creative methods to present the material to class participants. My teaching style includes all four basic methods for learning (visual, auditory, tachtal, and kinesthetic). One major teaching weakness was identified--the tendency to overload the cirriculum by including too much information. It is better to search for critical

issues and present only them to the class--additional information will cloud the memory of important content. I further learned to adopt an upbeat, faster pace in my presentations. Taping the Project Associate Meetings stimulated and guided my development in this aspect of classroom skills. The content and method of presentation is significant, but honest enthusiasm by the teacher is most important in stimulating classroom learning. This, again, strengthened my self-image.

The project identified a fourth area (preaching) for development. This pastor was functioning with a distinctive pattern. For a variety of reasons, the sermon was not the focal point of Sunday Morning Worship. Emphasizing scriptures, liturgies, and hymns led to a more participatory style in worship; being with people during the week became a top priority, leaving only minimal or leftover hours for sermon preparation. Sunday was seen as another day of the week and sermons were secondary in importance. These above activities, however, should not diminish the significance of preaching, but instead, compliment all attempts to share the Word of God. Preaching remains a dominant vehicle for shaping our decisions toward faith and nurturing our relationship with God. Sermon preparation and preaching continues to be every pastor's primary task.

Two factors kept recurring to change my view of the importance of sermons during my research studies and project activities. All church growth studies report that strong pastoral leadership and preaching are two essential ingredients in growing churches. By its very nature, preaching goes beyond simply sharing information. The gospel is fundamentally "good news" and Christian preaching has the character

of being good news. Whether a church will grow or not from preaching is not the important issue. Preaching itself, as a vehicle of good news, is affirmed. Doing the very best to present the good news through the sermon has excitedly become my most important pastoral function. Although Ronald J. Allen (1988, Preaching for Growth) is one author, there are numerous other writers and personal experiences leading my struggle to this conviction: "I am committed -- the sermon is of prime importance in a worship service" (Personal Journal).

A second factor influencing my view is the evaluations by church members concerning their expectations of the pastor. Each successive year, worship and preaching is rated as the number one pastoral responsibility. The priority is given--not because the current pastor puts everyone to sleep--but because his sermon abilities are affirmed. The church members are emphasizing the continual importance of preaching as the central means in the community for shaping decisions of faith and nurturing our relationship with God. The studies undertaken during this project support the church members' expectations. Sermon preparation has, therefore, become this pastor's weekly top priority. With distinctive energy, strategy, dedication, and the allowance of time, I will change my weekly philosophy and discipline to raise sermon preparation to its number one position.

CHAPTER IX

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Old Ways and a New Generation

This project was designed to address only limited issues related to adult membership classes. Two concerns have surfaced for future study and action. Not only do former rural churches need to adopt progressive and forward looking outreach philosophies, but they must, in addition, incorporate the unique charactersitics/expectations of a new adult generation. People born between 1946 and 1964 are known as the "Baby Boom Generation." These adults have not as yet entered church or synagogue doors with as great a frequency as former generations. Rural churches, especially in population growth communities, must welcome these new people or move toward extinction. One study has concluded:

> Rural churches, for the most part, have remained locally oriented and dependent. Specialization, in the form of organizational elaboration and professional leadership, has been resisted and remains minimal; congregational control continues, in fact and in spirit; traditional programs persist; and moral precepts correspond to those of the locality (Hassinger 1988, 159).

A genuine welcome includes a willingness to accept new ideas. Most of the immigrants to the North Branch Community are urban in

background. They bring with them some non-rural interests and attitudes that need to be included in congregational development. This pastor will strategize to inform the North Branch and Clifford congregations about urban and Baby Boom people. New community demographic research will accompany this plan. All church members will be located on a demonstration map, color-coded in relation to their years as members. Age-sex pyraminds will be updated every five years.

The second concern, holding to long-time programs, should come to our conscience as a result of understanding urban and Baby Boom people. Traditional programs will be examined to discover their effectiveness in communicating the Christian message to new generations. The saying, "If it works, don't fix it," has merit--as long as we observe who "it" is working for. The new generation will be given opportunity to express their program interests.

Improving New Member Orientation

The seven Adult Membership and Reaffirmation Class programs of this project significantly improve new member entrance into any United Methodist congregation. Concerns over being new in the church and issues regarding urban and rural background preferences can be included in the seven classes. Asking Caring Members or Sponsors to befriend new members is most helpful. Long-term members participating in the seven classes potentially increases community coheciveness.

With graduation, however, the special attention and help to new members quickly diminishes. The partner members continue their contacts with the new members; but differences in spiritual understanding, experiences, and growth of the new members leave some wishing for

continued study opportunities. As project director, I quickly became aware of the laxity of the United Methodist Church in encouraging extended class study for new members. The pattern is to ask new members to join already established classes, meeting usually only on the schedule of the established class participants. Some new members are long-time Christians, others have recently accepted salvation in Jesus Christ, while others are still searching to understand faith commitments. Existing classes seldom meet the needs of more than a few new people. I will develop and offer to new members (when they complete their membership classes) continued studies in Understanding the Bible, Christian Theology, and United Methodist Beliefs. The present objective is to create a ten-month study.

The importance of continuing studies for new members comes from sensing the shortness and limited focus of Adult Membership Classes. Significant issues often are deleted to keep pace with the basic membership agenda. A bonding between the class members developes, creating a desire to continue being together. A sense of confusion and sometimes lostness comes from the class participants; some express a desire to increase their knowledge of the Bible. Numerous questions surfaced concerning the position of the Scriptures and the United Methodist Church when addressing contemporary issues. Not every member would participate in a continuing study program; however, United Methodist Churches can enhance greater faith development and demonstrate a willingness to meet the needs of new members by offering extended classes for membership participants. My next project, therefore, is to design an "after-membership class" with a rurban context for new members in United Methodist Churches.

The Roman Catholic Church is impressive in its attempts to care for the needs of new adult members. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 1974, is the student's outline of a twelve-month premembership program. Each person receives What It Means To Be Catholic, by Father Joseph M. Champlin, 1986, and a third source, Pentecost '87, a National Satellite Celebration of Catholic Evangelization. Laity and priest together commit one complete year to facilitating the instruction requirements for potential Roman Catholic members. Waiting twelve months for membership in a local church may be too long, but engaging in twelve months of study before and after membership is a significant model. Robert E. Webber (1986), in his book, Celebrating Our Faith, provides additional insights into an adult's faith journey from conversion to discipleship, to spiritual preparation, to baptism, and finally to integration into the life of the church.

Continuing Education

The Doctor of Ministry Program, although designed by intensity for a once-in-a-lifetime-venture, increased this writer's appreciation for structured continuing education. College and seminary classes are available through local institutions and can be instrumental in increasing personal and professional skills. With design and purpose, I will select structured classes once every two years.

APPENDIX A

COUNCIL ON MINISTRIES
NORTH BRANCH UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
GOALS AND CONCERNS
September 1987

The following goals and concerns are in the order of personal preference as set forth by the Council on Ministries:

STATEMENT: We started our goal setting by establishing four areas of concern. From there, we developed eleven urgent needs.

AREAS OF CONCERN -- CARING FOR THE CHURCH FAMILY
PUTTING GOD AND CHURCH FIRST
REACHING AND KEEPING NEWCOMERS
MUSIC NEEDS

NEEDS -- 1) Increase membership commitment/stewardship by expanding membership training and spiritual commitment.

2) Provide a Shepherding Program for new members.

3) Offer more Intergenerational Programs (for ages 18-30).

4) Train helpers for leadership roles (i.e., teachers, shepherding, etc.).

5) Identify and assimilate new members.

6) Provide a Caring Program.

7) Provide transportation for senior members and youth, especially for night activities.

8) Develop a Follow-up Program for marginal worshipers.

9) Locate a multipurpose complex for classrooms and activities.

10) Organize a Bell Choir.

11) Offer more music opportunities for membership.

APPENDIX B

NORTH BRANCH CONGREGATION QUESTIONNAIRE
(Doctor of Ministry Program)

1. OCCUPATION: Farmer ___ Auto ___ School Teacher ___ Office ___
Business ___ Homemaker ___ Retiree ___ Other _____

2. AGE: 10-20 ___ 21-30 ___ 31-40 ___ 41-50 ___ 51-60 ___
61-70 ___ 71-80 ___ 81+___ Male ___ Female ___

3. RESIDENCE: From Infancy ___ 20 years ___ 10 years ___ 5 years ___
Less than 1 year ___

4. My neighbor moved next door from the: city ___ farm ___ small town ___

CIRCLE ONE ANSWER AS YOUR RESPONSE FOR EACH STATEMENT FOLLOWING:

5. Conversations with people at church on Sunday center on farm talk.
Usually Sometimes Seldom

6. The community of North Branch has changed in the last 20 years; I am
Saddened Indifferent Happy

7. I make this comment: "I used to know everybody in North Branch!"
Often Seldom Never feel that way

8. When neighbors move in, I invite them to my church within the first month.
Always Sometimes Rarely

9. When my neighbors are ill, I take soup, a meal, or visit them.
Always Sometimes Rarely

10. I have invited a neighbor or friend to a church event in the past 2 months.
Yes No Can't remember

11. I feel the people of the North Branch Congregation care about me.
Agree Disagree Undecided

12. If a church participant came to me with a personal problem, I would drop everything.
Agree Disagree Undecided

13. If I felt at odds with someone, I would avoid conversation with that person.
Agree Disagree Undecided

14. When I first attended church services, people extended warmth and friendship.
Agree Disagree Undecided

15. When I pray at home, I lift people of the congregation before God.
Always Sometimes Seldom

16. I have as much concern for people in other countries as I have for those in my community.
Agree Disagree Undecided

17. On Sunday mornings I go out of my way to speak to someone I do not know. Always Sometimes Seldom

18. I feel more warmth and friendship from the congregation now than I did when I first attended. Agree Disagree Undecided

19. When I first moved here, I didn't really care about church. Agree Disagree Undecided

20. In time of trouble, I would first turn to: Family Pastor Friend Prayer God Jesus Church Member Doctor

21. Please write any comments you would like to make.

THINKING ABOUT PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN BIG CITIES AND IN RURAL AREAS, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU FEEL WOULD BE MORE LIKELY? (Please check one category for each question).

	BIG CITY	SMALL TOWN OR RURAL	NO DIFFERENCE NO OPINION
22. Warm and Friendly to other people	____	____	____
23. In good health	____	____	____
24. Honest in their business dealings	____	____	____
25. Very hard working	____	____	____
26. Get real fun out of life	____	____	____
27. Work actively in community affairs	____	____	____
28. Concerned about problems and needs of people outside own communities	____	____	____
29. Open-minded about opinions of others	____	____	____
30. Well-informed on world affairs	____	____	____
31. Tension/pressure in daily lives	____	____	____
32. If you could live anywhere you desired, which would you choose	____	____	____
33. Where do you think is the best place to raise children	____	____	____
34. Where do young people have the best chance for a good life	____	____	____
35. People attend church more often	____	____	____
36. Better care of the poor or homeless	____	____	____

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR TIME AND EFFORT!

APPENDIX C

CARING MEMBERS

You have been invited to a short-term very important responsibility for our church! We have felt that our congregation needs to make a little more fuss over our new members--not just the day they join, but to help assimilate new members in the following months. Therefore, the Council on Ministries has developed a new program. We have given the title, Caring Members, with shepherd and sponsor terms in the background. It's not that others do not care, but you will be a specific representative of the church for at least three (3) months.

THE IDEA: To assist the new member in finding his/her involvement in our local church. This requires sensitivity--some people are quiet--each has unique abilities and interests. You are beginning the process of encouraging and supporting his/her choices for involvement (read #1 enclosed).

We hope new members will come once to the Administrative Board or Council on Ministries. This will provide a better picture of our church. You will need to pay special attention to the workings and activities of our congregation, finding ways to invite (not demand) their attendance. THEY WILL LEARN THE OPPORTUNITIES AND BETTER DECIDE HOW TO BE INVOLVED. Your responsibility is to encourage and support them.

Another equally important part of your caring responsibilities is to express Christian concern to the new members. They have spiritual needs also. We do not imply that you must care for expressed spiritual needs, although you may proceed on your own choice. We ask that you listen to these needs and inform the pastor or invite them to a study class. If there is some crisis (hospitalization, death, etc.) or if there is something happy taking place in their life, again, please inform the pastor or others, as appropriate. You do not need to become a friend with the new adult in your care, although that may develop. Just introduce and support the new person for at least three (3) months.

The committee planning this new program will welcome further ideas. On the attached page, we solicit your honest comments and suggestions--what do you like, what would you like to see changed, should we provide more support to our caring members? We will send an evaluation page later.

Finally, a word about your participation on Membership Sunday, 9:30 a.m. Try to come early and speak with your new member. Membership vows will be taken at the end of the worship hour. The pastor and lay leader will greet and welcome the new members. The pastor will explain briefly to the congregation our new Caring Program and the gifts being given to the new members. Then you will come to the front to greet your person and give him/her a pew Bible and This We Believe booklet. Stand with your adult member (the pastor will introduce the last hymn and welcome everyone to the reception in the League Room); as we begin singing, you will escort your new member to the League Room. A group picture may be taken during this time. The Adult Members will form a reception line and you may stay with your adult member to introduce people.

CARING MEMBERS

1. Caring members will encourage new members to attend meetings such as Administrative Board, Council on Ministries, or other committees of interest.

   Activities such as potlucks, banquets, coffee fellowships, Bible Study, Church School, Choir, etc.

   Organizations such as United Methodist Men, United Methodist Women, and other groups.

   Provide transportation if needed.

2. When making personal home and telephone calls, show Christian love and concern. Keep a listening ear for special needs.

3. Remember to introduce new members to other people in the church.

4. After three months from Membership Sunday, a committee meeting will meet and evaluate the results of this program.

5. You are expected to fill out a comment sheet and return it to the Council of Ministries box in the League Room of the church.

EVALUATION: Comments and suggestions - What did you like about the program? What would you like to see changed?

APPENDIX D

ADULT MEMBERSHIP & REAFFIRMATION CLASS

First Session

INTRODUCTIONS

!. Locate one person you do not know.

Learn the directions to go from your home to theirs.

Describe your home and family to that person.

2. What does your person like most about the North Branch Methodist Church?

3. Your partner's favorite Bible story?

INTRODUCE YOUR PARTNER TO THE LARGER GROUP.

!. Explain traveling from the church to their home.

2. What does your partner like most about this church?

3. Your partner's favorite Bible story.

A Study of Church Membership - Matthew 16:13-16

Agreeing on Class Sessions - dates & times

Take-home Paper - A North Branch United Methodist Church History

Closing in Prayer

ADULT MEMBERSHIP AND REAFFIRMATION CLASS

Second Session

Our class this evening will focus on the following:

- The Nature of the Church

  The Significance of Worshipping Together
  Values That Build Christian Fellowship

- The Nature of Christian Faith

- God's Activities in Salvation Through Prevenient Grace

  Justifying Grace
  Sanctifying Grace

ADULT MEMBERSHIP AND REAFFIRMATION CLASS

Third Session

Areas of Study:

- The Essence of the Christian Faith

  The Triune God
  Human Condition
  God's Answer

- United Methodist Foundation Documents

- Decision Making Guidelines

  Scripture
  Tradition
  Experience
  Reason

- Developing Christian Faith in a Congregation

- Putting God First

ADULT MEMBERSHIP AND REAFFIRMATION CLASS

Fourth Session

Areas of Study:

- Hints of Originality or Uniqueness for United Mothodists

  Experiencial Faith
  Scriptural Christianity
  Practical Faith
  Disciplined Living
  Connectional christianity
  Ecumenical Christianity

  A Practical and Realistic Faith - James 1:22-25

- United Methodist Origins

  Tracing Our Beginnings
  United Methodist Time-line
  North Branch Highlights

- The Significance of Being Rural

ADULT MEMBERSHIP AND REAFFIRMATION CLASS

Fifth Session

Areas of Study:

- Jesus, Our Personal Savior and Lord

  Encounters With Jesus
  Deciding to Acccept Jesus
  The Importance of Trusting God
  A New Source of Security
  Results From Accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior
  Radical Dimensions of Discipleship

- Openings of God's Grace for Growth in Personal Faith

- The Meaning of Church Membership

- Plans for next week

ADULT MEMBERSHIP AND REAFFIRMATION CLASS

Sixth Session

Worship Scriptures - Colossians 1:17, I Corinthians 12: 12, 14, 27-31

Areas of Study:

- Cooperation with a Purpose

- Linking Structures in the United Methodist Church

- The North Branch United Methodist Church Panel:

Administrative Board	Gretchen Orr
Council on Ministries	June Sillers
Lay Leader and Men's Group	Roy Stacey
Pastor-Parish Committee	Delores DeGrow
United Methodist Women's Group	Jeanie Stevenson
Missions Committee	Clare Lake

- In the Community and Beyond

ADULT MEMBERSHIP AND REAFFIRMATION CLASS

Seventh Session

Tour of the Church Facilities:

- The Composition of our Congregations

  Groups of Our Church
  Strengths of the Church
  Questions From Class Sessions
  Present Membership

- A Pesonal Commitment

  Because God Has First Loved Us
  Our Presence, Our Prayers, Our Gifts, Our Service
  To Give and To Grow In Our Relationship With Jesus Christ

The Service of Baptism and Membership

APPENDIX E

CLASS EVALUATION OF PASTOR'S LEADERSHIP
Second Session

I invite your comments for my improvement and class planning.

1. Worship is central to each Christian, because in worship we (please prioritize your answers, 1st to last choice)

   __ give thanks to God __ remember God's love __ refuel for living
   __ receive the Sacraments __ build a supportive fellowship

2. Circle the number to best represent your previous understanding of PREVENIENT, JUSTIFYING, and SANCTIFYING GRACE.

   Knew Nothing - 1 2 3 4 5 6 - High School Teaching Level

   Put a check on the above number that best represents your understanding since tonight's class.

3. My participation as leader through personal sharing was

   Vague and Unrelated - 1 2 3 4 5 6 - Clear and Appropriate

4. The stronger features of the class were

5. The weaker features of the class were

6. Further Comments or Recommendations to Improve Teaching and Class Planning.

APPENDIX F

CLASS EVALUATION OF PASTOR'S LEADERSHIP
Fifth Session

I invite your comments for my improvement and class planning.

1. I found the chapter, "What it Means to Accept Jesus as our Personal Savior and Lord", to be

   Same Old Stuff 1 2 3 4 5 6 Refreshing and Strengthening

2. The practice of Bible Study and developing a relationship with Jesus and Christian people as discussed tonight resulted in

   Still no Commitment 1 2 3 4 5 6 Complete Resolve

3. My participation as leader through personal sharing was

   Vague and Unrelated 1 2 3 4 5 6 Clear and Appropriate

4. The stronger features of the class were

5. The weaker features of the class were

6. Further Comments or Recommendations to Improve Teaching and Class Planning.

APPENDIX G

PASTOR'S LEADERSHIP EVALUATION

As you know, the Adult Membership and Reaffirmation Class met from November 6 to December 11, 1988. Those who participated had a great time. As a congregation, we celebrated with you on Sunday, December 11 and 18 during the morning worship service. Please take a few moments to indicate below how you feel Roger functioned in the six sessions (circle the level of your feeling in each question).

1. As a leader in each session, Roger functioned

   poorly 1 2 3 4 5 6 excellently

2. His level of self-confidence appeared to be

   weak 1 2 3 4 5 6 strong

3. As a teacher, he provided leadership

   poorly 1 2 3 4 5 6 excellently

4. Identified the spiritual significance of being a church member

   poorly 1 2 3 4 5 6 excellently

5. Made clear the responsibilities of being a church member

   vague 1 2 3 4 5 6 completely clear

6. Made clear the United Methodist understanding of GRACE, SALVATION, and WORSHIP

   vague 1 2 3 4 5 6 completely clear

7. Urban and rural concerns relevant to church members at North Branch were covered

   poorly 1 2 3 4 5 6 excellently

8. Facilitated class participation

   poorly 1 2 3 4 5 6 excellently

9. Seemed to grow and develop himself during these classes

   poorly 1 2 3 4 5 6 excellently

10. Please describe briefly what the Adult Membership and Reaffirmation Classes meant to you.

APPENDIX H

EVALUATION OF: Roger Gedcke's Classroom Procedures/Setting

EVALUATOR/OBSERVER: Susan K. Shoemaker

DATES OF OBSERVATIONS: November 20, 1988 and December 4, 1988

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND:

Roger and I met several times prior to the actual classroom observation to go over lesson plans for the Adult Membership and Reaffirmation Class. During those meetings we discussed class content, lesson planning, various methods of teaching, and styles of learning. Roger then proceeded to start teaching the classes, and by the third session he felt that both he and the group were ready to handle the scrutiny of an outside observer. He made it very clear to all of the students involved that I was there to observe him in an effort to assist him in improving his teaching techniques.

The class sessions that I observed were conducted in the church, in a large room, behind the sanctuary; comfortable chairs and couches were arranged in a circle. The class climate was relaxed and inviting. The lessons were well organized, smoothly paced, and interesting.

EXHIBITED LEADERSHIP SKILLS:

Roger possesses a myriad of leadership skills that he uses effectively in his profession. These same skills were used in the teaching of the adult membership classes. He is very people-oriented, and his sincere concern for his students is apparent in the preparation and planning that he made prior to starting the classes.

Roger's leadership skills were showcased very clearly in the two class sessions that I observed. He has the ability to start the class on time and stick to a prearranged timetable. He knows when to talk as well as how to listen. He maintained a gentle yet firm control of the discussions. Students felt free to share, but Roger did a good job of bringing the discussions back to the issue at hand if they began to stray off the topic.

During the second class that I observed, Roger had invited several of the lay leaders of the church to share information about their positions in the church with the class members. It was during this session that I was able to see how Roger was facilitating an opportunity that could lead to developing unity, cooperation, and understanding between the current members and the new members.

EFFECTIVENESS IN HANDLING THE TEACHING CONTENT:

Roger is very knowledgeable in the content area of the classes he was teaching. One problem with having so much knowledge in a particular area is trying to figure out what stays in the program and what has to go because of time limitations. During our initial meetings, we worked on focusing in on the necessities and then cutting out some of the extra material that could not be covered within the time allowed. We took the lessons that Roger had used with previous membership classes and streamlined them to meet the goals that Roger established for the current class. Once the new lessons were reworked and developed, Roger did an excellent job in presenting the material.

THE DEGREE OF FACILITATING PARTICIPATION AS PART OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE:

Participation of the class members played a large role in both of the sessions. When Roger wrote the lesson plans, he built-in some topics, questions, and methods that encouraged participation. In the first session, he used a time-line to trace the beginnings of the United Methodist Church. Everyone appeared to be taking notes on the handouts they had been given. When Roger went on to discuss the beginnings of the church in North Branch, he brought in some old photos of the original church buildings, and this really generated a lively discussion.

During the second session, Roger set up a small group participation exercise that gave the students a first-hand experience in the importance of cooperation. The exercise was called "Building Bridges" and the new members worked with the lay leaders in groups of five or six people. It was an enjoyable method to teach a lesson on a topic that is so vital to the unity of a church.

ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND MOVEMENT IN THE CLASS:

By observing two classes in a row, I was able to see where Roger was communicating a sense of purpose and movement. Both sessions were started with a short discussion of and agreement on when the class would next meet. Next, Roger read a scripture that related to the topic of the day. After a prayer, he reviewed the past couple of weeks in a sentence or two and then gave the students outlines of "Areas of Study". The outlines were written in a logical sequence leading the students through the material that was to be presented that day in class. Roger took the time to review where they had been and where they were heading in each of the classes.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berkley, James D. "What I Learned About Rurban Ministry", Leadership, 3:1 (Winter), 1982.

A pastor on the rural-urban fringe writes about the challenges of pastoring small churches. He compares this with his earlier urban experience in a large church of Los Angeles, California. Berkley identifies the rural-urban mixing "rurban" culture.

Braden, Suzzanne.

Brewer, Earl D. C., Theodore H. Runyon, Jr., Barbara B. Pittard, and Harold W. McSwain. Protestant Parish. Atlanta: Communicative Arts Press, 1967.

A research study of Rural and Urban Parishes from a theological and a sociological perspective. The interviewed responses to questionnaires and the author's comments describe the uniqueness of rural from urban beliefs and living patterns.

Dillman, Don A. and Daryl J. Hobbs, eds. Rural Society in the U.S.: Issues for the 1980's. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982.

The nostalgic and romantic image of rural living in America is waining. The numerous authors describe the issues and troubling dynamics causing the recent changes in rural America.

Dudley, Carl L. Making the Small Church Effective. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978.

Small church is defined as less than 250 members or 45 worshippers each Sunday, statistically. Sociological and family cell descriptions. Small churches may be very resourceful and motivated by response to human need. Goal-setting is helpful and realistic in a small church.

Dunnam, Maxie D. The Christian Way. Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1984.

The author provides refreshing commentary on United Methodist practices for spiritual growth. The strength of this book was the treatise on perfection and holiness based on John Wesley's beliefs.

Eby, Coach Floyd. Miracles of Love. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978.

Reading the examples given of God's direct involvement with people (and the author), deepened my faith and openness to God.

Flack, Frederic. Resilience, Discovering a New Strength at Times of Stress. New York: Random House, Inc., 1988.

The author believes life cycle transitions or crisis experiences often require "feeling apart times" for the person to move on. Although not stated by the author, an upheaval time may signal a recaptivity for effective evangelism.

Ford, Thomas R., ed. Rural U.S.A.: Persistance and Change. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1978.

A classic work on rural living as compared to urban experiences. Provides examples of the new rural America emerging from the confluence of rural and urban ways of life--important insights for this project.

Haugk, Kenneth.

Hunter, George G. To Spread the Power. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987.

Combines John Wesley's "soul-winning" pragmatics and current church growth strategies, giving examples and practical directives. Church growth, through evangelism, does not just happen; soul-winning requires not gimmics but definite planning.

Johnson, Douglas W. A National Study of Congregations as Units of Mission. The National Program Division, General Board of Global Ministries: The United Methodist Church, April 1985.

Studies are presented to support the belief that vital and growing congregations are those focused around missional objectives.

Johnson, Douglas W. and Alan K. Waltz. Facts and Possibilities. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987.

Using statistics, the United Methodist authors analyze the effectiveness of the United Methodist denomination in ministering within the population and cultural shifts. Positive correlation of anticipated trends from within the United Methodist Church bring enthusiasm to the evangelistic elements of this project.

Johnson-Tanner, Bobbi, and Doris Pierson Tanner. Obedience and Servanthood. Woodland Hills, California: Kirk Press, 1985.

Members of a Christian drama group, "The Covenant Players," are contributors to spiritual growth and devotional resource. I was challenged and nourished in my faith journey.

Judy, Marvin T. The Multiple Staff Ministry. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969.

The dynamics involved in developing a successful multiple staff for a large membership church bring to life numerous leadership ingredients required of any principal leader in any congregation attempting effective ministry.

Judy, Marvin T. The Parish Development Process. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973.

The author provides insights and suggestions for creating effective local church ministries. Leaders are encouraged to carefully examine ways to cooperate as congregations together in ministry.

Killinger, John. Bread for the Wilderness, Wine for the Journey. Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1976.

Read for devotional study--the author gave inspiring experiences of the power and the miracles of prayer.

McSwain, Harold Warren. Rural and Urban Parishes as Social Systems. A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the graduate school of Emory University, 1971.

Rural and urban people express differing beliefs, living patterns, philosophies, and expectations. This doctrinal paper helps identify theoretical differences between urban and rural people.

Morris, George E., ed. Rethinking Congregational Development. Nashville: World Methodist Council, Discipleship Resources, 1984.

The variety of articles analyzing church development patterns today sharpened the problems being experienced by churches and provided excellent hints for solutions.

Peck, Scott. The Road Less Traveled. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978.

Read for personal growth. The author examines the theories from psychology of personal development and brilliantly weaves in his belief of the direct influence of the love and grace of God that each person can release in his/her growth process.

Schaller, Lyle E. It's a Different World. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987.

Provides a diagnostic and descriptive account of how living opportunities have changed in the past forty years. The book documents the challenge to pastors and churches to develop new outlooks and internal programs to meet the needs of people and to share the Gospel in our different world.

Schaller, Lyle E. The Middle Sized Church. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985.

The author examines the "awkward" size church, averaging 100 to 200 weekly worshippers. The struggles and joys of the North Branch Congregation are enlightened by the author's suggested programs.

Schaller, Lyle E. The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.

All churches, by size, have unique characteristics. Leaders moving from one size to another must learn appropriate skills for effective ministry in the new location. This book sharpens church leadership requirements and skills.

Simons, George F. Journal for Life. Chicago: ACTA Foundation, 1975.

Part One: Foundations, Life in Christ, provides realistic suggestions for journal-keeping that identify and evaluate one's faith and emotional development as influenced by daily events, study, and reflection.

Southard, Samuel. Pastoral Evangelism. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.

The author presents a Biblical explanation and motive for evangelism. The probing examination of evangelism in the Baptist tradition, by a Baptist, provides valuable insights for understandings and practices of pastoral evangelism implicit in this project.

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church. Nashville, The United Methodist Publishing House, 1984.

The Official Journal and Minutes, Detroit Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1971-79, 1980-86.

Vidich, Arthur J. and Joseph Bensman. Small Town in Mass Society. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1958

A classic, sociological study of life and structures in a small rural town focusing on the 1950's. Although North Branch is smaller and viewed in a new age, tracings of life, as defined in this book, are most evident.

Wessel, James. Trading the Future. San Francisco: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1983.

As fewer farmers make yearly profits, the farmers and the nation are facing an economic crisis in the food chain. The family farm is in jeopardy. Government policies need revision to stabilize cost and profit ratios for foods.